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HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Wednesday, 21st November, 1934.

[OFFICIAL REPORT.]

The House met at a Quarter before Three of the Clock, Mr. SPEAKER in the Chair.

PRIVATE BUSINESS.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROVISIONAL ORDER
(LEICESTER AND WARWICK) BILL,

"to confirm a Provisional Order of the Minister of Health relating to the counties of Leicester and Warwick," presented by Sir Hilton Young; read the First time; and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills, and to be printed. [Bill 1.]

MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROVISIONAL ORDER
(HOLLAND AND KESTIVEN) BILL,

"to confirm a Provisional Order of the Minister of Health relating to the counties of the Parts of Holland and the Parts of Kesteven," presented by Sir Hilton Young; read the First time; and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills, and to be printed. [Bill 2.]

MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROVISIONAL ORDER
(CUMBERLAND AND LANCASTER) BILL,

"to confirm a Provisional Order of the Minister of Health relating to the county of Cumberland and the county palatine of Lancaster," presented by Sir Hilton Young; read the First time; and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills, and to be printed. [Bill 3.]

MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROVISIONAL ORDER
(GLOUCESTER AND WARWICK) BILL,

"to confirm a Provisional Order of the Minister of Health relating to the counties of Gloucester and Warwick," presented by Sir Hilton Young; read the First time; and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills, and to be printed. [Bill 4.]

MINISTRY OF HEALTH PROVISIONAL ORDER
(HOLLAND AND LINDSEY) BILL,

"to confirm a Provisional Order of the Minister of Health relating to the counties of the Parts of Holland and the Parts of Lindsey," presented by Sir Hilton

Young; read the First time; and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills, and to be printed. [Bill 5.]

PRIVATE LEGISLATION PRO-
CEDURE (SCOTLAND) ACTS, 1899
AND 1933.

Return ordered,

"of all the Draft Provisional Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Acts, 1899 and 1933, which in the Session of 1933-34 have been reported on by Commissioners; together with the names of the Commissioners; the first and also the last day of the sittings of each group; the number of days on which each body of Commissioners sat; the number of days on which each Commissioner has served; the number of days occupied by each Draft Provisional Order before Commissioners; the Draft Provisional Orders the Preambles of which were reported to have been proved; and the Draft Provisional Orders the Preambles of which were reported to have been not proved:

And also a Statement showing how all Draft Provisional Orders of the Session of 1933-34 have been dealt with."—[*Mr. Skelton.*]

BILLS PRESENTED.

ELECTRICITY (SUPPLY) BILL,

"to authorise the Central Electricity Board to make certain arrangements with authorised undertakers who are the owners of, or control, generating stations which are not selected stations; to authorise the Central Electricity Board to supply electricity directly to railway companies for certain purposes; to amend sections eleven and twelve of the Electricity (Supply) Act, 1926; and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid," presented by Mr. Hore-Belisha; supported by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Attorney-General; to be read a Second time upon Monday next, and to be printed. [Bill 6.]

EDUCATIONAL ENDOWMENTS (SCOTLAND)
BILL,

"to extend by a further period of two years the period during which the powers of the Commissioners appointed under the Educational Endowments (Scotland) Act, 1928, as amended by the Educational Endowments (Scotland) Act, 1931, may be exercised, and to empower the Scottish Education Department to disapprove schemes submitted to them under the said Acts and to frame amended schemes, and for purposes connected

therewith," presented by Sir Godfrey Collins; supported by the Lord Advocate, the Solicitor-General for Scotland, and Mr. Skelton: to be read a second time upon Monday next,* and to be printed. [Bill 7.]

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION.

ROYAL WEDDING (LICENSING HOURS).

Captain PETER MACDONALD (*by Private Notice*) asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in view of the decision to grant an extension of hours of permitted sale for alcoholic liquor to hotels and restaurants for three days in connection with the forthcoming Royal Wedding, he will undertake to give sympathetic consideration to any application for extension of a similar nature for all sections of the On-Licence Trade in this connection, with a view to ensuring that all classes of the community shall benefit equally?

The SECRETARY of STATE for the HOME DEPARTMENT (Sir John Gilmour): I presume that the hon. and gallant Member is referring, in the first part of the question, to the grant of special orders of exemption in the Metropolitan Police District, where the granting authority is the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, subject to my approbation. I have no jurisdiction in the matter of extension of permitted hours in any other district. So far as the Commissioner is concerned, every such application will be given full and sympathetic consideration.

Captain MACDONALD: Is it not the case that there is a great deal of con-

fusion in the minds of magistrates as to whether this is a special occasion or not; and will it be made certain that this concession is being given in London, in order that they may follow that decision?

Sir J. GILMOUR: Outside London it will be a matter for the petty sessional courts, and they will judge for themselves.

WRITTEN ANSWERS.

AFFORESTATION, CARNARVONSHIRE.

Major OWEN asked the hon. and gallant Member for Rye, as representing the Forestry Commissioners, what acreage has already been planted in the county of Carnarvon by the Forestry Commissioners; and what is the programme for the present season?

Sir G. COURTHOPE: The Forestry Commissioners have planted 5,700 acres in the county of Carnarvon, where the programme for the present season is 555 acres.

Major OWEN asked the hon. and gallant Member for Rye as representing the Forestry Commissioners, how many acres which have already been bought remain to be planted in the county of Carnarvon; and whether it is the intention of the Commissioners to purchase more land in that county for the purposes of afforestation?

Sir G. COURTHOPE: 6,935 acres acquired by the Forestry Commission in the county of Carnarvon remain to be planted. More land will be acquired in that county if areas suitable in price and otherwise are available.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE.

2.52 p.m.

• **The PRIME MINISTER (Mr. Ramsay MacDonald):** I beg to move,

"That, during the present Session, Government Business do have precedence at every Sitting."

The Leader of the House who has to do this task does it only out of a sense of sheer necessity. It is most unpleasant to ask private Members to give up the opportunities which the Standing Orders allow them on Wednesdays and Fridays, and I only do it now because I believe that private Members will be only too anxious to assist the Government in getting through a programme which is unusually large and the largeness of which is not owing to the action of the Government. The situation is this: We have been preparing for years for the final stage of the consideration of the constitutional position of India within the British Empire. As I said yesterday, we have had Conferences—round-table conferences and others—and we have had the Select Committee of both Houses which has gone carefully into the whole question. We now have the report of that Committee. It is going to be discussed as a report first of all. The Bill which will issue from it will be discussed on Second Reading before it is brought to the stage of detailed examination and so on. At the same time there is a need which every Member of the House will recognise to go on with the very pressing social legislation indicated in the Gracious Speech from the Throne.

Can we postpone either of these great sections of legislation? Can we postpone, for instance, the India Bill? We cannot. It would be one of the most—I was going to say insane—it would be one of the most insane acts of Parliamentary policy if after all the preparations and all the expectations aroused in India we said: "The domestic situation, the social situation at home, is such that we have to postpone for another Session, for another 12 months, the consideration of the report of the Joint Select Committee." It is a sheer impossibility. Whatever view one may take of the Bill, whatever view one may take of the report, one cannot say that handling of the situation would be either to our honour, or advisable from the point of

view of Indian public opinion. That the House should proceed with a full discussion right from the beginning to the end, a discussion of the report and a discussion which will carry us right through to the Third Reading of the Bill—that is what the House is bound to face, and we must find time in order to do it.

On the other hand, the Government see no reason why the social legislation should not be proceeded with as well. It is not legislation that can be delayed. We cannot, for instance, wait for another Session to pass legislation that will make the experiment in the special areas effective. One of our critics yesterday said that this was not done and that was not done and the other was not provided for and so on. But I can assure him and those who feel like him that the Government know that perfectly well, and they are going to supplement the announcement that has been made of these appointments by legislation that will clothe the experiment with authority. That cannot wait for another Session. Take housing and the proposals supplementary to the slum legislation and the slum push. Who will say that this House is not going to put itself, if I may say so, to inconvenience in connection with that matter and to place at the disposal of the Government sufficient time to enable that legislation to be put upon the Statute Book?

The House knows quite well that as soon as the legislation is on the Statute Book months will probably be required for the completion of negotiations, the preparation of plans, the study of the best methods and such questions as those raised for instance by the hon. Member for Bridgeton (Mr. Maxton) yesterday: Are local authorities, with the sanction of the Government, going to build huge sunless blocks of tenement dwellings or can something be devised on the lines of the Vienna experiment for instance? Those hon. Members who have seen that very interesting experiment know very well that the description of my hon. Friend does not apply to it. All these things will require a little time, and the Government must not be hustled in such a way that they sanction the building of houses that are not going to be adequate and when finished will leave the position not very much improved. We are going to take the time necessary to consider

[The Prime Minister.]

how the powers which we shall be asking the House to give us in this Bill are to be used. That is all the more reason why without months of delay that legislation should be on the Statute Book, so that the machinery for putting it into operation can be set up. The fact of the matter is that if we try one section or another, either the Indian section alone or the social reform section alone, or try the Indian section completely, with a truncated and altogether inadequate social reform programme, it will be regarded as a test imposed on Parliamentary institutions which this Parliament has not stood. We believe that the House will give us power to do both, so that at the end of 12 months we may have carried into effect every one of the substantial and really pressing tasks mentioned in the Gracious Speech.

In putting this proposal forward I think the Government ought to take the House into their confidence in a way that is only done later in the Session, and explain in definite figures what the outlook of this Session is so far as time is concerned. Will the House allow me to go through a recital, which may be a little bit dull, but which, nevertheless, I think is necessary in order to persuade and convince the House that the Resolution that I am asking the House to give us is necessary? After allowing for the usual recesses at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide, there are the equivalent of 105 whole Parliamentary days at our disposal up to the end of July next, and out of that total it is estimated that the usual compulsory and routine business will require 57 days. That will include 22 days for Supply, 13 to 14 days for the Budget and the Finance Bill, a certain number of days for Adjournment Motions and contingencies. The Government have always been very anxious to meet Opposition and other important interests in this House that wanted subjects discussed, and, if all those are added together, it amounts to something like 65 days out of the 108. That leaves 43 days for the Government business, including the India Bill, during the normal Session to the end of July. In those 43 days we have to deal with the India Constitution Bill, the Shipping Industries Bill, the Housing Bills—one for England and Wales and also one for Scotland—

the Depressed Areas Bill, and a very necessary Bill, the Electricity Supply Bill.

There may be other Bills that will become urgent in the meantime. Everyone who has planned Parliamentary time, a Parliamentary Session, knows very well that he has never yet succeeded in saving time on the first plan, but that as time goes on new requirements crop up, and, instead of having a very nice comfortable margin somewhere about the middle of July, he discovers always that he is some days in arrears and has to make it up either by the sacrifice of bills or by methods which are not altogether desirable. The India Bill itself, with its many important issues, will require a good deal of time. In fact, I think that language is a little misleading in its generalness. The Bill must be a long one; it cannot help being a long Bill. It will undoubtedly take up the bulk of the purely Government time available during the Session. Until the Bill is ready, we cannot say how long it will take. We know that last Session the proceedings in connection with the Unemployment Bill occupied, with the help of a Time Table Motion, 25 whole sittings. That was a Bill of 64 Clauses. The India Bill will consist of some 300 Clauses. Then add the others, and it is perfectly obvious to everybody who looks objectively at the problem with which we have been presented that we have to let either one or the other of the important sections of the programme practically go. I do not believe the House would agree to that, I do not believe the House would agree to the dropping of the India Bill; I do not believe the House would agree to taking up practically the whole time for the India Bill and leaving us perhaps, with one of the social reform Bills, may be accompanied by a very tiny, second-class contribution to the problems that we want to solve.

Every day until the Christmas Adjournment will be required for this class of business. The Depressed Areas Bill will have to pass, the Electricity Supply Bill will have to pass, the Housing Bill will have to be read a Second time, the Unemployment Assistance Regulations will have to be debated and approved, the India Report will have to be debated, and there must be some Supplementary Estimates, as usual, dealing with depressed areas, and perhaps one or two other matters. I can assure the House

that the programme has been carefully considered, and, if we can manage to waste no time, that programme can be carried through.

Mr. ALBERY: In saying that there are 108 days of Parliamentary time available, will the right hon. Gentleman kindly say if that includes private Members' time?

The PRIME MINISTER: Yes, the 108 days include the private Members' time. From Christmas to Easter we shall have to finish off the Bills begun before Christmas but not completed. For instance, we shall take Second Readings before Christmas and then proceed to complete the Bills between Christmas and Easter. The India Bill will have to be read a Second time and start on its consideration in Committee. That is between Christmas and Easter. From Easter to July is the time for the Budget, the Finance Bill, and the completing of the business of Supply. Undoubtedly the bulk of the time will be occupied in the consideration of the India Bill. It therefore comes to this, that the Government require every available day, and, regretful as it may be, private Members are being asked—and I hope they will respond to the request of the Government in the special circumstances of the Session—to agree to sacrifice their privileges to enable important problems of the Session to be dealt with.

I ought to remind the House that the bulk of the private Members' time falls before Easter, and that is usually the overloaded period of the Session when so much time is required for Supply; and it will be specially overloaded now because we cannot postpone stages in legislation that in normal Sessions can be postponed until the bulk of the Supply is dealt with. This fact caused the Government in the past to take the time of the House before Easter. Our problem is the time before Christmas, and we have to be a little bolder in explaining our position to the House and in asking it to respond. This condition comes but rarely, and the cause of it is the situation in which we find ourselves with two supremely important causes—India and home affairs—coming and meeting in such a voluminous way. I should be failing in my duty as the head of the Government if I did not invite the House to face the realities of the situation and ask it to

give us time to consider the India Bill without diminishing the power of Parliament to deal with the social legislation which the Government deem it necessary to pass in the interests and for the sake of the tranquillity of the country.

Sir WILLIAM DAVISON: How many additional days will the taking of private Members' time provide?

The PRIME MINISTER: I am sorry I overlooked that. It will provide 21 full days.

3.13 p.m.

Mr. LANSBURY: In ordinary circumstances I should have felt rather apologetic in opposing this Motion because of what Governments which I have more or less supported have done in the past, but I cannot help feeling that the right hon. Gentleman has overwhelmed the House to-day with a statement as to the tremendous programme that is in front of us. I have been trying to search my memory as to whether, when the Home Rule Bill was before the House, Mr. Gladstone found it necessary to move such a Motion. I am not sure, but I think he did no such thing. The Home Rule Bill was accompanied by a Land Bill and there was tremendous controversy in regard to them, and, although these two Measures were in the end wrecked because the Government was put out of office, it is still true, I think, that the Government did not think it necessary to ask private Members to give up their rights at the beginning of the Session. I am not sure whether that was so or not, but my recollection is that such a Motion was not made.

The only case of which I can find any trace in recent years was a Motion moved by the late Mr. Bonar Law in 1919. The Session opened in February, and because of pressure a Motion was made to take the whole of private Members' time. This was later amended so that the time was taken only until March. Then the position was reviewed, and the Motion was not proceeded with; that is to say, private Members got all the time that remained after March. It must be remembered that the Session started then in February; the limit was March, and after March, I understand, private Members got back their time. This time we have the India Bill and other Measures dealing with domestic questions.

[Mr. Lansbury.]

I listened to the right hon. Gentleman, and for the life of me I cannot see why he should contemplate that, in the ordinary way of things, it would be impossible to get the India Bill through, provided he did what I think would not hurt it, namely, if we found ourselves at a deadlock for time, carried it over to October. I want to see that Bill through if it is what I hope it will be. I have not seen it or the report, but, if we are to discuss the Bill properly, I cannot understand why there is such a tremendous necessity for finishing it in July. My friends have not any shooting to do, and we shall not go yachting. If we got a month's holiday we should come back in September, and I should think the whole House would. I do not know why Members should not come back in September and for once fully earn their salary. It has always seemed to me extraordinary that we should rush up to a certain date. Sometimes we kill a lot of time in the middle of the Session, and then, during the last days, we are driven to finish at a particular moment. There is no law of the Medes and Persians about not sitting in September—and the birds would have a better chance perhaps. It would save treating private Members as mere ephyres.

Sir W. DAVISON: Hear, hear. Good old Opposition!

Mr. LANSBURY: In the present House when we first came back I used to say to my friends, "When I sit down on the Front Bench I look round, and I find my opponents behind me, on the right of me very often, on the left of me, and in front of me." Nowadays I find an opposition to the Government to the left of me and an opposition—a very deadly one—being organised right in the centre of the army behind the Government. What can the poor Leader of the Opposition do when he finds so many different competing camps? God forbid that I should attempt to speak for all of them, because they are all quite capable of speaking for themselves, and I do not see why it should always be left to me to try to interpret what is in the mind of the right hon. Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) so that I can represent his opposition to them. In connection with a Motion like this, people often talk of the feeling outside of disgust with

Parliament, of the people being tired of Parliament. I do not think that feeling is so prevalent among ordinary people as some of those who talk about it really imagine, but what I have heard in criticism of Parliament is the view that we are all too subordinate to our various parties. It is often charged against us that we are a party who always act together; and so on. Everyone in this House knows that there has grown up a feeling of party loyalty such as was quite unknown years ago, but I think that is largely due to the altered character of the legislation with which the House has to deal. I am quite certain that our present machinery will very soon either absolutely break in our hands or will have to be very drastically amended, but I do not believe that the way to amend it is to take away all initiative from private Members.

When I said the other night that I want to see the time come when Members will be free of the domination of organisation or of majority decisions I really meant it. I would like to see Parliament free of party, but we are as we are and we are bound to have consideration to that fact; and every now and then the House of Commons had to face this kind of situation, a situation in which the Government tell us, "If you want to discuss in an effective manner the legislation which we and you think is necessary, then all that the Members of this House can do is to give consideration only to the business which we think necessary." I think that is asking too much of the House and really destroys the representative character of Parliament. I am quite prepared to hear it said that if my friends were only on the Government benches, or if the Liberal party were there, that we and they would do the same thing; but that is no answer at all. The real point is that in this Session there are several Bills dealing with our own domestic affairs and one big overshadowing Bill which will take a considerable amount of time, and that the Government now come down and say, "In order to find the necessary time private Members must give up all their rights to introduce legislation and resolutions."

It is often said, and sometimes with a little truth, that private Members on occasions raise questions which appear to be quite futile, but I would point out

that there is scarcely a big reform which has been undertaken by this House which has not first of all passed through a long series of discussions introduced by private Members. I would remind hon. Members of daylight saving, though I know some Members who represent agricultural areas do not like it. I remember how scornfully the proposal was regarded when it was first introduced, by Mr. Willett, but we have lived long enough to realise that in towns, at any rate, it is a very great blessing. Then there was the question of women's suffrage. We may not agree with it but we are all now living under universal suffrage. Proposals for women's suffrage were brought in again and again and again by private Members. The subject of widows' pensions was brought up again and again by private Members. One could go over a whole list of Measures in that category, and it seems to me that all of them have added to the well being of the nation.

Finally, I want to say that we think the Government ought to have waited to see how we got along with the programme of legislation before moving this Motion. No one—not I, at least—likes to be driven or forced to do things. I think I am as soft as anyone in answering a soft word, but I cannot stand being bullied or driven. I do not say that the right hon. Gentleman has bullied us this afternoon, because he scarcely ever does so, but he is trying to drive us very hard indeed. The Government ought to take back this Motion and let us see how business goes between now and Christmas, and then bring it forward then if it be necessary to do so. I cannot believe there will be great obstruction to the India Bill. I cannot believe that the Government's own supporters will try to wreck the biggest Bill the Government are bringing forward. That would be quite a new doctrine—for a Government to start on an undertaking thinking that their own comrades were going to "down them" in this fashion. I cannot believe it will be so. They are much too loyal to their Government. They have proved their loyalty. Even when they have gone into the Division Lobby against them it has only been when they knew perfectly well that it was quite safe to do so. Some of us have done that; I am not speaking with any superior virtue, be-

cause we are all inclined to do that kind of thing.

I repeat that no necessity has been proved for the course the Government are asking us to take, in spite of all that long story which we heard, and which I am sorry the Patronage Secretary did not circulate to all of us, because it would have been very nice to have it in front of us and to be able to make suggestions for amending it. Instead of trying to rob private Members of all their time the Prime Minister should try us out until Christmas and then "report progress," as it were, and, if necessary, bring forward this proposal again. The suggestion we put forward from those benches is this: We recognise that it is going to be a heavy Session, and we are not in a position to disprove the fear that there will be great opposition to the India Bill, opposition amounting almost to obstruction, but we contend that the proper course would be to allow the Bill to get as far as ever it can until July and then let the House adjourn, not for three months but for one month. Let the Government give us a good holiday and we shall come back like giants refreshed and be able to gobble up the remainder of the Bill without any trouble. We shall vote against the Motion.

3.30 p.m.

SIR PERCY HARRIS: Perhaps for the first time in this Parliament the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition has represented sections in all parts of the House. I am convinced that in his very moderate and reasonable appeal to the Prime Minister he was speaking, not only for his own party but for many private Members on both sides of the House. I have a vivid recollection of the Lord President of the Council making a similar Motion and a similar appeal to the House at the beginning of this Parliament that we should grant private Members' time. It was distinctly understood that the powers were asked for only because of the national emergency and of the exceptional situation created by the financial crisis.

In spite of the eloquent appeal made by the Prime Minister, I do not think that he has made out his case at this stage of the Session. He based his case on the India Bill, but there will be general agreement that that Bill is not a party issue but a great constructive, con-

[Sir P. Harris.]

stitutional proposal which causes differences of opinion in every section of the House. The right hon. and gallant Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Colonel Wedgwood) and the right hon. Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) have opinions of their own upon it. Most of us do not know what the contents of the Bill are, and, if ever this House should be a council of State, as it ought to be, and should approach a problem from a judicial point of view, it will be in regard to the Indian constitutional problem. I do not think any section of the House wants to make that a party issue. We ought to criticise the Bill and examine it in detail Clause by Clause, not to wreck it but to improve it and reconstruct it. It would have a profoundly bad effect throughout the British Empire if any section of the House were to use the occasion to embarrass the Government and to cause difficulties. We should, therefore, assume that there will not be obstruction and delay, but only reasonable criticism.

A short time ago we discussed the Betting and Lotteries Bill, which was very long and caused great differences of opinion, but it was not approached from the point of view of party. There were long Debates, but not many Divisions. Is it not reasonable to assume that when we discuss the Indian constitution there will be the same approach and that there will be discussions and criticisms but not many Divisions? I believe I am safe in saying that, if the Government are faced with any real obstruction and opposition, the vast majority of Members of all parties will give them all the necessary powers to get their Bill, whether those powers are in the form of a Guiltotine or of a closure.

In reference to the rest of the programme, the Prime Minister is overrating its size and importance. This is a humdrum, ordinary Speech from the Throne. It is true that it includes a Housing Bill dealing with overcrowding, but that is not a party issue. We have all understood that housing as such was beyond party, and I am certain that the vast majority of hon. Members will approach that question in a non-controversial spirit. It is reasonable to assume also that the Bill will go upstairs. I supported the proposal to give the chairmen of committees power to select

Amendments in order to make it easy for Bills of this kind to be dealt with in Committee. I do not regret doing so, nor do I apologise for doing it. It is an improvement in the machinery of the House, because this kind of Bill, largely a machinery Bill, is better dealt with in Standing Committee than on the Floor of the House.

There is the Electricity Bill. Is it not reasonable to assume also that that highly technical and controversial question, which is not one of party, will go upstairs? There is the question of the better housing of the Metropolitan Police. Will that delay the House? The only big Bill of a controversial character is that dealing with the distressed areas. With Members of the Opposition we object to its limitations. We should like to see it extended and bolder, and with more money behind it, but we shall not be able to amend it in those directions because we should be brought up against the Standing Orders. The number of Amendments which we can make will be limited, and our criticisms will take the character of saying that the Bill is inadequate and not large enough.

There is no justification in the King's Speech for the Government asking for extra time, except for the constitutional problem of India. I have been a private Member for many years, and I know that Governments think that they have a monopoly of ability and brains. They get power and position, and they think that in them remains all the capacity to initiate legislation. We should be most careful to retain the very few rights and privileges left to private Members. We have to go through elections every few years, when we are subject to severe criticism and much opposition. Our people are beginning to doubt whether it is worth while our being in the House of Commons except to have a seat on the Treasury Bench, because all it means is that we sit up night after night and attend here day after day to register the decrees of the Government and to answer the orders of the Government Whip. It means long hours, late nights and very few rewards. One thing we still have is the right, on occasions, to initiate legislation, in the dim hope that we may get our Bill on to the Statute Book. The Leader of the Opposition has made a most reasonable appeal. He met the Prime Minister in the spirit of

his speech, and I believe that it would be the act of a strong man and not an act of weakness if the Prime Minister would postpone robbing private Members of their rights until, at any rate, after Christmas.

3.38 p.m.

Mr. CHURCHILL: This is a very drastic and unusual proposal. The Government are making a demand which I have not often heard made in all the time that I have been here. Not since 1921 or 1922 has such a demand been made. This Parliament has not hitherto shown itself careful of the rights of private Members, and it is a remarkable fact that that should be so, in view of the high hopes that were entertained by the new Members who came into the House. One might have hoped that they would have developed a very strong and vigorous sense of its position. Considering that party politics are practically extinct, because of the overwhelming majority of the Government, one hoped that those Members would have been most zealous to preserve the opportunities for freedom open to private Members in the limited time allotted to them. We are always hearing that private Members are not showing that fertility, ability and originality which are necessary to keep alive our Parliamentary institutions, and yet here are the Government taking away those opportunities of legislating and of ventilating large general issues which have always given, to private Members and to young Members in many cases, an opportunity of establishing themselves as Parliamentary figures who would, in time, replace those who sit upon the Front Bench. Why is it necessary for the Government to do this? They have an enormous majority, far larger than they require. But, quite apart from that, on the particular Bill which is to be the main topic in the new Session, the India Bill, they have the promised support of the Socialist Opposition—[**HON. MEMBERS:** "No!"] The right hon. Gentleman was very careful to say that he was anxious to go as far as possible and to get the Bill if he could not get anything better. That is what I understood him to say yesterday; I do not wish to misquote him.

Mr. LANSBURY: I wish to be quite clear on this matter. I said that we should put before the House our views as

to what the Bill should be, and we should move what Amendments we thought necessary, but we should do nothing to obstruct the passage of the Bill—that we should act as I think an Opposition ought to act in dealing with a Measure of that kind.

Mr. CHURCHILL: I do not think that that was quite what was conveyed to my mind. The idea conveyed to my mind was that the right hon. Gentleman indicated that, although the Bill did not go as far as he and his friends might wish, at any rate they were supporters of getting the Bill through if they could not get anything better—or, as we should say, worse. I think that that is the position. Certainly it is very remarkable how often the Government are supported by their Socialist and Liberal opponents. That ought to make it quite easy for them to get their legislation through. When I came back to the House after the Election of 1931, I was most desirous of voting against the Socialist party, and I do so whenever I get an opportunity, but I always find that the National Government is in the Lobby with them; it is very difficult to separate them. And yet, with this enormous majority, with an absolute docile House of Commons—the most docile that I have ever seen—and with the great measure of support which comes from the Labour benches, and on many occasions from the Liberal benches, the Government have to ask us to make this very great mutilation, in fact complete elimination, of the liberties of private Members.

I must point out that no answer has yet been given by the Government to the very reasonable suggestion which was made by the Leader of the Opposition—on this occasion, as an exception, functioning in his normal constitutional capacity—that, if the India Bill takes longer than is expected, it should be carried over to the Autumn Session, and Parliament should come together at such earlier date as may be necessary to secure a fair and full discussion of so momentous a Measure. No answer has been made to that suggestion. The Prime Minister's argument is quite watertight and holds together as long as you assume that at the end of July Parliamentary activities must necessarily come to an end, and the Session must be brought to a close before the House

[Mr. Churchill.] adjourns. But nothing of the sort is the case. We can go for a short recess to the country, and then come back to resume our labours. We ought not to scamp our duties on a matter which may effect, perhaps permanently, the whole fortunes of this people and the great Empire in India.

Let me point out that, if we are in this difficulty, the fault is entirely that of the Government. We have been called back for the last month to waste our time upon two Bills, the Betting and Lotteries Bill and the Disaffection Bill—two Measures singularly ill-conceived and of very questionable utility. We have been waiting a whole month, taking the glamour off the beginning of a new Session, wearying the House with late sittings almost every night. If those days since we were recalled here at the end of October had been saved, and the Session begun then, there would not be the slightest need to take these 21 days from the private Members. It is their mishandling on the part of the Government that has got us into this position. Having blundered on, plodded on, forced their way ahead with this resistless, dumb, blind force which they have at their disposal, having thrust their way on in spite of every warning, they have now got into a difficulty, and who is to pay the price? They are breaking their way out through the procedure and privileges of the House of Commons, and the private Members are to be the losers. That is where we stand to-day. Do not let it be said for a moment that the reason why the private Members have to give up their time is that, besides the usual time for the India Bill there is to be a great programme of social reform. The reason is that the Government are reluctant to call the House together in the early Autumn, and they have got into such a mess with their Betting and Lotteries Bill and their Disaffection Bill that they have taken the whole bloom off the new Session of Parliament.

There is another way in which I imagine the right hon. Gentleman might endeavour to facilitate the progress of our business, and that is if he would develop the practice, which he has observed to-day, of coming down himself and leading the House. Really, the right hon. Gentleman need not look so impatient. I have seen greater men than

he occupying his position, who have valued, quite as highly as the position of Prime Minister, the honour of leading the House of Commons; and a great deal of facility is given to business by the personal touch and personal contact and relationship established between the Prime Minister and the House when he acts as Leader of the House in Parliament. I remember the late Lord Balfour, who was always most assiduous in his attention to his duties in the House. It is really no use the right hon. Gentleman keeping aloof from his fellow Members—standing off like an absentee landlord giving orders to evict, collect rents, and so forth, and having the estate managed for him. I am sure that, if he were able to come down and watch the proceedings for himself, he would not be called upon to adopt the drastic and roughshod measures which he has found it necessary to propose to us to-day.

I am not sure that I should have risen to take part in this discussion at all but for the remarks which the Prime Minister made yesterday about the India Bill. He seems to have adopted a tone of menace with regard to that Bill. He would give what he thought fair time, but no licence. But since when have Members of Parliament had to get a licence? We have our rights, and you, Mr. Speaker, are the judge of our exercise of those rights. It is certainly not for the effective Government to be the sole interpreter of what is reasonable in discussion and what is stepping beyond those bounds which they think convenient to their conduct of public business. It seems to me to be a most unusual, and, in fact, I think unprecedented, thing to suggest, as the right hon. Gentleman has suggested quite plainly, the adoption of a Guillotine procedure before a Bill has even been presented to the House. It is customary, as indeed, the Leader of the Opposition has indicated, to allow a Bill to run a certain distance, and then, if it is seen that discussion is being pushed beyond what is due and normal, the feeling of the House supports the Government in asking for a special time-table for their Bill.

At the moment nobody has seen the Bill. Theoretically it does not exist. We were told that the Government could not make up their minds about it until certain conferences had been held, and

so forth. The report has only come into our hands this afternoon. But the Prime Minister knows that the Bill contains 300 Clauses. What grounds are there for assuming that the tactics by which it will be resisted will be dilatory tactics? As I said the other day, I do not consider that it is justifiable, or ought to be possible, for a minority to resist the settled will of Parliament by means of purely dilatory tactics, but there must be upon a great Measure of this kind party and controversial discussions and occasions when there are sharp differences, which perhaps afterwards are composed and a more smooth passage assured for the Measure.

It is a great pity to destroy the whole freedom and life of Parliamentary discussion by making the House Debate within the Guillotine. I certainly think it most unusual and most undesirable, and a bad precedent, that the Prime Minister, months before the Bill is introduced, should already be threatening private Members with the application of these drastic proceedings. Moreover, it is not only unusual. It is a very unwise thing from his point of view to let the country know, when many important discussions have to take place in the country, that the Government are perfectly resolved, if they can have the power and if authority is given to the Leader of the Conservative party as well as to the Prime Minister, with the aid and support of the Opposition and in association with them, to ram this Bill through Parliament by the most drastic measures. I hope that will be widely known throughout the country and borne in mind by all persons who are taking an interest in this controversy.

It is quite true that with the power at the disposal of the Government they certainly will be able to steam roller and plough down the opposition. That is why people in the country who have an opportunity of considering these matters should walk very warily, because of the greatness of the responsibilities which are thrust upon them in a matter of this kind. It seems to me that we have before us a sombre, a melancholy and an ill-starred Session. What is going to happen may give great satisfaction to hon. and right hon. Gentlemen opposite. We are going to witness, first of all the deprivation of all the rights of private Members, secondly, the applica-

tion of the Guillotine Closure with great severity to enormous constitutional measures of historic importance, and, thirdly, the process of the Conservative leaders trampling down and dragooning their followers amid the cheers and war whoops of both the opposition parties which are constantly and busily engaged in attacking the Conservative party in the constituencies.

4 53 p.m.

Colonel WEDGWOOD: I am getting rather tired of hearing this subject debated, particularly when it is always debated as though it was a question of depriving private Members of their rights and privileges and taking 21 days from them. You are not taking rights or privileges from private Members and you are not depriving them of 21 days in which to air their views. You are depriving the country of a legitimate opportunity of carrying on the principles of the British Constitution. After all the main object of Parliament is criticism of the Government. You are depriving the country, and not private Members, of some 40 opportunities of criticising the Government. Naturally no Government likes criticism, but the balance of our Constitution as it is developed up to now is that the Government should not be all powerful in choosing the subjects of Debate or getting their Measures through. There should be a balance in the opportunity of democracy of making its voice heard and its criticism felt.

It is possible for a Government to avoid criticism unless they are forced, in a Debate on a Resolution or a Bill, to make up their mind and state their case. I think nearly all the Bills introduced on Friday afternoons are Bills that a sensible man would vote against, but it is very good for the people who introduce Bills to hear the case stated against them, and then in the following year they can recast them on better lines. As for Resolutions, I have no hesitation in saying that the most valuable part of Parliamentary work is the opportunity once a week of bringing in a Motion which shall elucidate one side of Government policy. The Government hate having to state a case, because they have to take a more or less hard-faced, brutal Treasury line on nearly every Resolution that is brought forward. After all, if we are going to educate the country, if people outside are

[Colonel Wedgwood.]

to know the pros and cons, they must have the Debates on such questions in the public Press.

The Government by this Motion are not robbing private Members of anything; they are robbing the country of an opportunity of understanding and criticising the Government. That, I think, is the line that we ought to go on in opposition to it. The whole struggle at present is a struggle of the executive and the permanent officials against the country as a whole. Every Motion that they bring forward to curtail and censor the opportunities of criticising Ministers—everything done in that direction still further accentuates the authority and power of the executive and still further deprives the people of the country of that very proper and right control over the permanent officials and the executive.

Are not the Government taking their fences before they are quite ready for them? In connection with this India Bill for instance, we have watched during the last 10 days the amazing and very regrettable results of the General Election in India. You have now elected in India an Assembly the elected Members of which are pledged to one thing and one thing only, and that is opposition to this constitutional Measure that we are going to inflict upon India. Surely it is inconceivable that, against the wish of the Indian Legislature we should pass a constitutional Measure and enforce it upon them. The Assembly is to discuss whether it will or will not accept the Bill based upon the Report of the Committee. When the decision is taken, it is quite possible that every member elected for a general constituency will vote for the *status quo* rather than for the new Measure. If that comes about, is it conceivable that we shall have spent all the rest of the weary time going through the further stages of that Bill which, when we pass it, will not be accepted and cannot possibly be forced upon an Assembly which, so far as the elected part of it is concerned, is unanimously opposed to it. If we are going to take 21 days of private Members' time and hand them over to a Bill which will not be accepted by the people for whom it is intended, we might wait and see what the result of that vote in the Assembly will be before we rob the country of opportunities of criticism.

There is one other thing to remember. There are lots of Members who merely act as genial conveyors to the public of certain Bills. There is my hon. and learned Friend opposite who is associated with divorce law reform. He had never heard about it until a Bill was put into his hands. It is, however, the people outside who are suffering. I, myself, am interested in only one or two little private Bills. One is to enable the rating of land values instead of houses. I also had hope of introducing a Bill to enable the Government to buy up property at 25 years purchase of its scheduled value. All these things are stopped by this Motion. It is not that we are deprived of the opportunity of moving Bills, but that the country, which wants the advantage of discussion of these problems, is deprived of its rights.

4.2 p.m.

Sir BASIL PETO: I cannot think of a stronger argument in favour of the Government's proposal than the speech of the right hon. and gallant Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Colonel Wedgwood). I would ask hon. Members to cultivate a little sense of proportion. However desirable any other legislation may be, there can be no matters of greater urgency than the programme of legislation that we have to get through. Some Members—the right hon. Member for Bow and Bromley (Mr. Lansbury) is certainly one of them—seem to me to argue as if this were a proposal to alter the practice of the House of Commons, and permanently to deprive private Members of their opportunities and put all authority in the hands of the executive. It is nothing of the kind. What the House has got to consider is whether, in view of the programme of legislation, this is a reasonable proposal or not. I consider, in the present circumstances, it is reasonable that the Government should have made this exceptional Motion.

The right hon. Member for Bow and Bromley said that private Members' time served an extraordinarily useful purpose, because frequently Measures which were ultimately adopted by the House and the Government—and he instanced the Daylight Saving Bill—have been first introduced in this House by private Members. That is no argument in the present circumstances. Any of these new Measures may be very useful, but his own argument was that they did not ultimately become

law for three, or four, or perhaps a greater number of years. Here we are not dealing with social Measures that can be postponed for three or four years. Tramp shipping cannot wait; slums cannot wait; none of these things can wait. One of the Bills we are possibly going to consider, if time permits, is for checking ribbon development along our roads, which will be perfectly useless two or three years hence; it will be locking the stable door after the horse had escaped. I repeat that hon. Members must really cultivate a sense of proportion in these matters.

The main argument, however—and this was particularly developed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill)—relates to the Government of India Bill. I am sorry the right hon. Gentleman is not in his place, but, in spite of that, I must be allowed to say that it seemed to me to be the most illogical argument. He inveighed against the Government. He even talked about the possible restriction of debate by Guillotine Motion or anything of that kind. I should be absolutely with him there, but what sort of an argument is that for depriving the House of the time to be given by this Motion to consider that very Measure? We must admit that the Government have the power, if they want to use it, to drive through the India Bill, which we have never yet seen and know nothing about, to move Closure Resolutions or to give to you, Mr. Speaker, power to select Amendments, to skip over Clauses of the Bill and get through, somehow or other.

That is a course which I should regard as absolutely disastrous, for whatever views this country or India may take on this subject—and the arguments of the right hon. and gallant Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme were very strong in connection with the elections and their results—I am certain that it would not be tolerated that this Bill should not be given ample time for full debate and full criticism of every important vital Clause. It is not a Measure likely to recur. Surely only once in a century will this Parliament have to deal with a question so wide, far-reaching and momentous. It is because of that that we must make sure, so far as we can, even at the inconvenience which is caused not only to private Members but to the public—I agree with the right

hon. Gentleman on that point—by taking private Members' time for this one Session. We must have time to debate that Bill. It is vital, and, therefore, as this is a Motion to ensure that, I cannot myself resist the Government's proposal.

The right hon. Gentleman made a suggestion to the Government that they should postpone this Motion until after Christmas, to see what measure of progress is made and the necessity for it. I venture to suggest that that would not really help matters. Surely it would not be of any use to private Members or possible legislation if initiated to postpone this Motion until Christmas, with the prospect of Bills having gone a certain distance and possibly one or two Resolutions debated. But, so far as the Bills are concerned, nothing would get upon the Statute Book, and merely a certain amount of time would have been occupied in the ventilation of certain subjects which might be given legislative effect two, three or four years hence. That, I submit, in the present circumstances, is not a suggestion which meets the case at all.

The right hon. Member for Epping and I do not think alike with regard to two Measures passed recently. The Betting Bill did not pass this House in the form I should have liked, and does not do the amount of good I should think it could have been made to do. But surely it is a subject which, if ever it was going to be tackled, could only be tackled by a Government constituted like the present one. Then with regard to the Incitement to Disaffection Bill, I am thankful to see that on the Statute Book, much as it may have been misrepresented outside. That, again, was a thorny subject which it was vital should be tackled, so that seditious practices should come within the arm of the law. I think both those Measures were useful and essential features of legislation. Therefore, I do not regret the time taken in passing them.

Another suggestion has been made from the Front Bench opposite, and supported by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping. He said, let Parliament adjourn for a brief recess, say, for the month of August, and come back refreshed so that we should be able to swallow the remainder of the India Bill. With my right hon. Friend's years of experience and high office in every

[Sir B. Peto.]

Department of State, I should have thought he would be the very last man to make such a suggestion.

Mr. CHURCHILL: I never did. The expression was "gobble it up," and it was made by the right hon. Gentleman opposite.

Sir B. PETO: I apologise. I gave my right hon. Friend credit for one of those oratorical phrases, which was not his own. After all, if we are asked to take that view, let us consider what would be the general effect on the machinery of Government. I think it would be a fatal thing if Parliament, even for a single year, were to sit for 11 months and leave those who have the conduct of public business only a month to get into contact with Departmental work and prepare legislation. We should be ham-stringing the Session which would succeed this one, and making it impossible for any useful legislation to be properly considered for the session following. Therefore, as I see it, this Motion of the Government is inevitable, and I think that we have to recognise that, considering the peculiar circumstances, we have got to deal with a very exceptional situation which is not likely to recur, I would say, in the lifetime of any Member now in this House. We cannot be said to be creating a precedent. We are not even adding to a precedent, because conditions at the present time are such as will not return.

Though I have not the slightest regret in finding myself in opposition to the views of the right hon. Member for Bow and Bromley, or those of the hon. Baronet the Member for South-West Bethnal Green (Sir P. Harris), I do regret that I cannot see eye to eye in this matter with my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping, for in many of the Debates that are coming in the Session, I shall probably find myself in close agreement with views he may put before the House; but because I think it important that we should take any step necessary to ensure that no part of the Government of India Bill should be passed through this House under rules and restrictions to curtail debate and discussion, although I do not welcome it, I am prepared to accept and agree to the proposal made by the Prime Minister.

4.14 p.m.

Mr. PALING: I was rather amazed to hear the remarks of the last speaker. I have been in this House a good many years, and it is not often that I have been able to agree with the hon. Member on questions of policy, but I have always looked upon him as being one of those Members of the House to claim his rights as an individual Member of Parliament. Therefore, when he got up to-day, I was pretty sure he would be one in opposition to this Motion. If my memory serves me aright, I believe it was not long ago that he nearly got the sack from his party because of the line he took upon a certain matter. I should hate to think that because of the pressure put upon him he has become so complacent as to support the Prime Minister whether right or wrong. From that point of view, I was very disappointed with his speech this afternoon.

With regard to the right hon. Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill), who is not now in his place, I did not dislike to hear him attack the Government, for I think this Government is so bad that I can almost welcome any ally from wherever the attack may come. I do not know that I agree with him that when he comes down here he always finds the Socialists in the Government lobby. I do not think that he is an expert on that business. He is not here often enough to be a good judge. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Epping selects the time at which to come to this House very judiciously. He comes when he can get the maximum amount of lime-light, and he certainly gets it. He is not a good judge as far as the number of times the Socialist party find themselves in agreement with the Government. God forbid that we should be criticised in the country for supporting, and voting for the Government in respect to the retrograde legislation which they have put through since 1931. The Prime Minister states that this is to be an arduous Session, with a long list of legislation to be got through. That is always said, and I think that, after examination of the position, on this occasion, everybody will agree that probably the only Bill to be submitted in the present Session will be the India Bill. The Prime Minister says that it is likely to be a long Bill containing a lot of Clauses and that it will take a long time to discuss,

but I do not think that that is a sufficient reason for depriving individual Members of all the time of which they have a right in this House.

Sir B. PETO: What ground has the hon. Member for saying that the India Bill is only going to be introduced this Session? Surely, the strongest argument for the Motion is to ensure that domestic legislation is not cut out.

Mr. PALING: The India Bill was the only Bill described as likely to take a long time. It will be a big Bill in that sense. I do not say that other Bills will not be important, but I do not think that they will be big in the sense of the India Bill, or will take a long time. The Prime Minister advance a rather new argument. He used arithmetic, and said that the Unemployment Bill last year contained 64 Clauses and took 25 days, and that the India Bill will be one of some 300 Clauses, the idea being that it will be about five times as long as the Unemployment Bill, and that, if the Unemployment Bill took 25 days, it is legitimate to argue that the India Bill will take five times 25 days, or something over 100 days of the Parliamentary Session. Does the Prime Minister or anyone else really believe that that will be the case? That was really the only argument which he put up.

He referred to the Bill to deal with the depressed areas, and I should have liked to have believed that that Bill was to have such important things in it that it would be likely to take up a lot of Parliamentary time. I think our opposition to that Bill will not be so much on account of what is in it as what is not in it. It promises to be the most emaciated Bill which this Government have ever introduced to deal with a very important problem. The Prime Minister mentioned the Housing Bill. Is that to contain such an overwhelmingly new principle that it will be likely to take up a lot of time? He mentioned that we might have to discuss whether the new houses to be built in towns should be of the Vienna type. Is that an indication that the Bill will make provision for houses of that type? If it be the best Bill that one can imagine, the right hon. Gentleman need not expect much opposition from us. We shall be only too glad to help him if it be a good Bill.

He says, "We will not be hustled." When the time comes for the present

Government to go to the country, the last criticism which the country will make will be that they were hustlers. If any criticism be made of the Government at the present time it is, not that they hustle, but that they are apathetic and complacent and are really doing little of any importance. The Prime Minister is not here at the moment, but I will say this in his absence, though I wish he had been here. If there has been any hustling done in the present Government, it has been hustling on the part of Tory Members, who have managed to hustle the right hon. Gentleman away from principles which he has propagated all his life. That is the only hustling that can be put to the credit of the Government to-day.

There was an important book written by a member of the legal profession—I am not sure that he was not a judge—some years ago pointing out the dangers of bureaucracy and the growth of bureaucratic government and how the executive was taking unto itself more and more power, and how individual liberty was being suppressed. I do not know that I agree with all that was said in that book, but there was an element of truth in it. It is that which is being done in the Motion proposed this afternoon. The Government are making this Motion in order to carry out the particular legislation that they want and to deny to any Member the right to initiate any legislation. Important as the Government consider their legislation to be, whether it relates to housing, depressed areas or anything else, there are other important matters, some of which may be equally important to the mind of individual Members and also to the country. It is not fair that the country should be denied the right of having such legislation put into operation.

There is the question of Wednesdays usually devoted to private Members' Motions. I have heard it said many times that they serve no useful purpose. Perhaps they do not serve as big a purpose as was intended, but it so happens that in the course of a Session there are questions which crop up in the country and in which the country is vitally interested, and it is sometimes a very good thing that such questions can be put down for discussion here on some Wednesday afternoon and be fully debated. Now we are to be denied this privilege

[Mr. Paling.]

The Government have not made out a case this afternoon for taking away private Members' time, and I hope that hon. Members on the Government side of the House will resist the Motion. In 1921 the Government tried to do a similar thing, but the opposition from their own part of the House was so great that they had to withdraw the Motion to take private Members' time for the whole of the Session and to limit the period to about six weeks. If hon. Members will do that on this occasion, we shall be able to maintain the rights of private Members in this the most complacent and reactionary of Parliaments.

4.24 p.m.

Major Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR: This is not a question on which any hon. Member need fear examination of his personal record. The personal standard is not the issue. If a Member is a Member of the Government he will naturally not be averse, faced with a situation in which awkward discussions are raised and awkward demands are made for declarations of Government policy on embarrassing points, to those opportunities being taken away from private Members, nor will he be averse to using the time which is at the private Members disposal. If the rights of private Members are to be defended, and if the encroachments of the executive upon those rights are to be resisted, it can only be by private Members. Just as private Members in 1921 successfully resisted the Government of that day, I hope that private Members in all quarters of the House will resist the demand which is being made by the Government this afternoon. The Prime Minister has described to us this gargantuan feast of legislation which the Government have spread before us, but if we look at it, there is only one huge matter of controversy. It is controversy that wastes time. I would rather say that it is on controversy that time is spent. Matters such as the Housing Bill would receive a Second Reading here and would, I hope, go upstairs to Standing Committee, the Chairman of which would be armed with his new powers. Questions of type of house, whether it shall be Vienna houses or some other type, are appropriate to be discussed by Standing Committee upstairs, and there is no reason why the time of the House should be taken up by such matters.

The right hon. Gentleman said: "Here are two great subjects, India and social reform. Can we postpone either of them?" The hon. Baronet the Member for Barnstaple (Sir B. Peto) said: "Let us have a sense of proportion." Apply a sense of proportion to the tasks which the House is set and to the time available in which to discharge those tasks, and there is no case for the Motion which is being put before us to-day. On the one hand, there is no case because these Measures are not likely to make large demands upon the time of the House as the Prime Minister suggests, because—and this is the point I wish particularly to make—the time at the disposal of the House is much longer than the Prime Minister suggests. I say to the Prime Minister, and to the Patronage Secretary, that it is not true to say that this House of Commons has only 108 days at its disposal. I say advisedly that that is not true. I have here the actual days spent in Sessions in recent years by the House of Commons. In 1925 there were 126 days, the next year 150, the next year 143, the next year 115, the next year 100, the next year 187, the next year 185, the next year 183, and the next year 141. In all those years there has been only one year in which the number of days allotted for the Session has been as small as 108.

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the TREASURY (Captain Margesson): Is the right hon. and gallant Gentleman suggesting that the Prime Minister is juggling with figures, or, if not, what exactly is he trying to suggest?

Sir A. SINCLAIR: I have made a perfectly clear statement of which I challenge contradiction. It is a plain statement. The number of days in the Sessions in the years from 1925 onwards is as I have stated.

The LORD PRESIDENT of the COUNCIL (Mr. Baldwin): We want to be clear about this matter. I thought that the information had already been given. I understand that the right hon. and gallant Gentleman is referring to the end of the Session, and not to the end of July. I understood that the Prime Minister's statement referred to the end of July.

Sir A. SINCLAIR: I am referring to the end of the Session. Why should the Prime Minister limit himself to the end of July?

The PRIME MINISTER: I limited myself to the end of July in order that the House might see what was available up to the end of July, and the days, which would perhaps be fairly numerous, over and above that, would have to be taken in a normal Session.

Sir A. SINCLAIR: That may be what the Prime Minister is concerned about, but the House of Commons is concerned about whether there is any justification for this encroachment by the Executive upon the rights of private Members. I am saying that in fact in recent years there has been only one year in which the days available for public business in a Session has been fewer than 108. In every other year we have had far more days available than 108. In the year 1912-13 Parliament devoted 206 days to the transaction of public business. Does the Prime Minister say now that the present Government, supported by an unprecedented majority, far greater than that at the disposal of that Parliament, are only willing to give 108 days to public business in this Session as opposed to 206 days?

The PRIME MINISTER: The right hon. and gallant Member must be careful. The question is, up to the end of July. In those years, how many days had the Government available? Much less than he has indicated. That is very important.

Sir A. SINCLAIR: With respect, they were not less than I have indicated. I have not indicated the number of days devoted to Private Business up to the end of July. I am putting to the House this question: Are we to allow the rights of private Members to be encroached upon by the Government, when there will be available, not 108 days this Session, but any number of days, even up to 206 days, which was the number in one year? If the number of private Members' days is 21, and we add that to 108, we get 129 days. That has been the normal number of days for the work of a Session in recent years.

Perhaps I have put my point a little too provocatively. I did not wish to do so. I do not wish to suggest that the Prime Minister or the Patronage Secre-

tary were deliberately trying to deceive us. It is beyond their power to wish to do that, and we do not suggest it for one moment, but we do suggest that it would be misleading for the House to allow this question to be discussed on the lines put by the Prime Minister. If it were true that we had to bring our deliberations to an end at the end of July, that would be a very formidable fact, but it is not true. There is far more time available for the House of Commons than has been suggested, and there is no justification for proposing at the very beginning of the Session that the time of private Members should be taken. There has been only one precedent for it, and that was in 1932, when the Government had been returned at the General Election, and they were starting the Session in February and not in November. Therefore, they had a much shorter time, and they were in the middle of the crisis, when great new Measures had to be brought forward. The conditions then bear no comparison to the conditions now, and yet that is the only precedent upon which the Prime Minister can rely for making the demand that private Members should give up the whole of their time from the beginning of the Session.

I know that the Prime Minister is only moved by a desire to get business through, but I would appeal to him to reconsider the matter. For our part, we are not likely to make any extreme demands, and I do not think that private Members will make extreme demands. We ought to have a sense of proportion, as the hon. Baronet the Member for Barnstaple (Sir B. Peto) said. Why not allow things to run on until Christmas, as suggested by the Leader of the Opposition. That was a reasonable suggestion. There is nothing in the Government's programme that we on these benches wish to fight, on principle, as a vitally controversial matter. Therefore, we shall not be holding things up by obstructing the business of the Government. Let us make an effort to work together. I think that private Members in all parts of the House will want to get the programme through. Therefore, let us work together until Christmas and see what progress can be made.

I do not feel any antagonism towards the Government or any desire to hamper them in the programme put before the House. Why cannot the Motion be post-

[Sir A. Sinclair.]

poned and consultations take place through the usual channels? Such consultations took place in 1920, I think it was, and in 1921—there are two or three precedents—and very useful conclusions were reached. The consultations were carried on with good will. That would be a happy precedent to follow. I can assure the Prime Minister that we are not in the least anxious to hamper or trip up the Government or to obstruct its programme. All that we are anxious for is that some understanding should be reached. Failing such an understanding, we shall feel bound to defend the rights of private Members and to vote against the Motion.

4.36 p.m.

Colonel GRETTON: I am very reluctant to address the House to-day, after having taken up a few minutes yesterday, but I feel impelled to make a protest against the Motion now under consideration. It has fallen like a bomb-shell upon us. We had heard rumours that the Government might require all the time of the House during this Session, but it is only when the Session has opened that we find this Motion on the Order Paper to take the time of private Members. It is not treating the House fairly to try and carry a Motion of this far-reaching importance without giving a little more time for consideration, and without allowing the House to see the Measures which are given as the reason for this very drastic Motion, and to form a conclusion whether the proposal of the Government is a wise one. I agree with the hon. Baronet the Member for Barnstaple (Sir B. Peto) that before we make sacrifices we ought to be sure that there will be ample discussion for that vastly important Measure, the Government of India Bill.

What is there in the other Measures so controversial as to make it necessary for the Government to encroach on the rights of private Members? As the right hon. and gallant Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Colonel Wedgwood) has pointed out, the other Bills will go to Committees upstairs in the ordinary way. I am not one of those who think that it is vital that private Members in every Session should be able to bring in Bills and to have them discussed. That principle is the least valuable of the rights which we are now

asked to sacrifice. What I look upon with very great concern is the proposal that during the whole of this Session private Members shall be deprived of any right whatsoever of bringing forward Motions to discuss subjects of vast importance, which cannot be reached in the ordinary procedure of the House on the proposals of the Government, and which do not attract the Opposition by way of Vote of Censure or otherwise. I look upon that as a very serious and most unnecessary encroachment upon the rights of Parliament. If it be not too late, I suggest that the Government should seriously consider meeting the case by allowing a limited number of Wednesday afternoons or Wednesday evenings to private Members for the introduction of Motions. I do not ask that the whole of the privileges of private Members should be maintained, in view of the statement that has been made by the Prime Minister, but I do suggest that on Wednesday afternoons or Wednesday evenings private Members should be allowed to bring forward Motions, if they have been fortunate in the ballot. In the absence of any kind of concession or consideration, I can only say that if the question goes to a Division I shall very reluctantly find myself obliged to register my vote as a protest against this very drastic proceeding at this period of the Session.

4.40 p.m.

Mr. ANSTRUTHER-GRAY: I have a great deal of sympathy with the last point raised by the right hon. and gallant Member, but I have no sympathy whatever with the attitude of the Opposition in this matter. Surely, if there be a complete waste of time it must be a private Bill brought in by a Member of the Opposition. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because it has no hope at all of being passed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is bound to be opposed by those who are against the Opposition. I am nervous in speaking on this matter because my experience is so short—I shall be corrected if I am wrong—but in the present Parliament I do not think that any private Member's Bill of any substance introduced by a member of the Opposition has been successful. Apart from that, I do not think there is much in the complaint of the Opposition to-day of not having an opportunity for bringing forward private Member's Motions. If there arises any point to

which they want to draw attention, they can always do it by a Vote of Censure, and that is something which supporters of the Government cannot do.

• The whole sacrifice is really being asked from supporters of the Government. Those of us who think that England is the mainstay of democracy against dictatorship must feel nervous about any suggestion of an encroachment upon the rights of private Members, but I do not think that such fears come in in this case. We are really faced with this position: "Do we want to spend our time considering comparatively unimportant Measures or do we want to carry out the work outlined in the Gracious Speech?" I have looked at the list of private Members' Bills which were successful in the last two years. Only 12 of them were passed, including the False Oaths Act, the Trout Act, the Registration of Births Act and the Firearms (Amendment) Act. I agree that these may be useful Bills introduced by private Members, but it would not be right to postpone such Measures as those relating to housing, the distressed areas, the Government of India, and shipping for the sake of calling attention to little Measures.

I am not nearly so happy so far as Motions on Wednesdays are concerned. I have looked up the list of Motions proposed during the past year, and I find that the questions considered included shipping, air defence, Empire development, the fishing industry, Japanese competition and road accidents. These are important questions, and since that time most of them have led to legislation or will lead to legislation in the future. Of course, on a Motion no action is taken, and it is only a question of talk. We want action, but it must be action along the lines of supporters of the Government. I believe the Wednesday Motions give a very good opportunity for supporters of the Government to voice their views before a Bill is drafted, which gives a much better chance of their views being produced in the Bill than by way of Amendments, once the Government have introduced the Bill. Moreover, the discussion of these Motions gives the Government an opportunity of gauging public opinion on these Measures. The Government are depriving us of an opportunity of voicing our views and depriving themselves of an opportunity

of learning what their supporters desire. In return for what we are giving up, might I ask the Government to consider Amendments put forward by their own supporters a little more sympathetically than they have been doing lately in the case of the Betting and Lotteries Act? I am sure that that is the best way of keeping the Government in step with their own supporters both in the House and in the country.

4.46 p.m.

Mr. ALBERY: When I first saw this Motion on the Order Paper I felt, as a private Member, a considerable amount of resentment. During the 10 years that I have been in the House the position of a private Member has tended to deteriorate. There is a constant endeavour to hasten legislation, and it is almost impossible for the average private Member to take an intelligent interest or an active part in the legislation which goes through. Amendments which are put down by private Members to Bills are not called for the most part, and, therefore, a proposal to take away the time of private Members during the whole of the Session is a drastic encroachment on their rights. It may be argued that the rights that are now enjoyed by private Members are not the most suitable in form. There may be a case for altering them, but I hold the view that the position of a private Member in this House is a matter of supreme importance to the country. The position which Parliament will hold in the estimation of the country depends not upon the Government so much as it does upon the status of the private Member. If you destroy that status you go a long way to destroy Parliament and Parliamentary institutions. This is the process that has been adopted in other countries which has led to the establishment of dictatorships.

Apart from one's private feelings on the matter, and I do not think that a case has been made out for the Motion at this early stage of the Session, there are other reasons why the Motion is undesirable. It seems to me that to put aside one or two days a week for private Members' business, that is an interruption of public business, has many great advantages which ought to be seriously considered. In my opinion, public business is much better done when it is occasionally interrupted; it is certainly

[Mr. Albery.]

much better done than when it is constantly rushed along at full speed. There is no excuse for rushing legislation except that of a purely temporary nature in a case of emergency. During the comparatively short time that I have been in the House I have seen much legislation pass this Chamber in a faulty condition. It would have been much better if more time had been devoted to it. I do not think it is helpful to try and accelerate legislation to the extent that has been the case in recent years. Too much legislation is introduced, and then the Government find that the only way to deal with it is to destroy our Parliamentary procedure upon which the traditions of the House are based. The suggestion put forward by the right hon. Gentleman opposite seems to me to be a good one, and if the Government would adopt it some of us would be much appeased. Is it not possible for the Government to allow private Members to have Wednesdays for a time and then see how they get on with their business? If it becomes necessary to take the whole time of the House there would not in that case be so great an objection. Personally, I do not think it would be necessary, and I cannot believe that any section in the House is going to play about in an obstructive manner on a Measure so important as Indian constitutional reform.

4.52 p.m.

Lieut.-Commander BOWER: I am one of those private Members who is in his first Parliament, who has not spoken more than half-a-dozen times and on every occasion has assiduously followed the advice given by Mr. Speaker and has not spoken for more than 10 or 12 minutes. That is more than can be said for a great many hon. Members. Lately certain right hon. Members, who have hitherto been content to attend once a month or so and speak for over an hour, have been more frequent in their attendance; possibly they are in training for future events. That means, of course, that back bench Members are going to have even less chance than before of taking part in general Debates. The right hon. Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) has described the Government majority as a great battering ram which the Government can bring into operation by just pressing a button. That may be so, but what is going to happen when

that battering ram is whittled down and the shattered remnants of a lost legion sitting opposite suddenly have an accession of strength? It seems to me that in such a case the course of legislation will be even more difficult than it is now, and that it will be even more necessary for the Government to take away private Members' time.

We who have so very few chances of speaking in this House do value those opportunities very much. In my opinion some of the most useful and constructive Debates which have taken place have been on Wednesdays on private Members' Motions and on Fridays on private Members' Bills. Some of those Motions have led already, and are still leading, to legislation. This privilege of ours should be jealously guarded. I have not been long enough in the House to know whether or not we are losing our privileges, but it appears to me that the tendency of the modern age is to restrict and whittle down the privileges of the private Member. We must prevent that going too far. I hope the Prime Minister will be able to meet our views in some respects, especially as we have given him such loyal support. I myself have always voted for the Government even when they have done foolish things, and have only voted against them, rarely, when they have done abjectly foolish things. I hope the Prime Minister will meet the wishes of those of his supporters who speak so seldom and vote so often.

4.58 p.m.

Mr. DINGLE FOOT: I desire to support the appeal that has been made to the Government. The right hon. Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) referred to the newer and younger Members of the House, and it would be unfortunate if the views of the newer and younger Members of the House were those represented by the remarks of the hon. Member for North Lanark (Mr. Anstruther-Thorpe). The hon. Member used a phrase about unimportant Measures brought in by private Members. Who is to decide whether a Measure is unimportant or not? The whole crux of the issue is that the Motion leaves it entirely with the Government to decide whether a Measure can be regarded as important or otherwise. The hon. Member also referred to the small Bills which have been passed on the introduction of a private Member. I have not a list with me, but I can

give him one important Bill which has been passed on the introduction of a private Member; that is the Bill, it is now an Act, dealing with appeals to courts of quarter sessions from courts of summary jurisdiction. People who consider that they have been unjustly convicted by a court of summary jurisdiction can now appeal to quarter sessions. That may be considered a small matter, but, speaking from my own practical experience, it has been a great boon to many people who have been able to get a conviction quashed. But for this Act, carried through by a private Member, they would have been unjustly convicted and possibly unjustly imprisoned.

I have read the statement made by the Prime Minister yesterday, and I listened with care to his statement to-day. I still think that we are entitled to further and better particulars regarding the programme of the Government. He gave us a list of Bills, but did not indicate how long they would take or whether they would be dealt with on the Floor of the House or by Committee upstairs. It is impossible for the House to decide how long the Housing Bill or the Tramp Shipping Bill is going to take. He referred to the India Bill which has not yet been drafted, and gave us to understand that it would take a great deal of Parliamentary time. We all agree, but surely the position of the Government amounts to nothing more than this, that they are very busy and, therefore, it is convenient to them to take private Members' time. There is no Session nowadays in which that statement might not be made. It could have been made with equal truth at the beginning of the last Session, in which we had to deal with the Unemployment Bill with a large number of Clauses. It may not be so important a Measure as the India Bill but it was a Measure upon which a larger number of Members were competent to speak.

The debates on the India Bill will rather take the form of a discussion between experts familiar with the Indian situation, and hon. Members who have no first hand knowledge of India will have to act rather in the capacity of a jury and decide between the arguments on one side and the other. On the Unemployment Bill there was scarcely a Member who was not competent to take part in the Debate. After all, if there be

more business than can be transacted in a normal Session, is it not a simple matter to prolong the Session? Even if we add to the 108 days up to the end of July the 21 days which are to be taken from private Members it would still be the third shortest Session in the last 10 years. The Leader of the Opposition suggested that we should return in September. If our business be so pressing, there is no reason why we should not go on for a week or two into August. There is at least one precedent for that. In the year 1909 the House not only sat through August and September, but until the 3rd of December without any Recess at all. If it were possible to do that on the Measures passed in 1909, it would be justifiable to do it on the India Bill and to complete the Bill without taking private Members' time.

It seems to me that this Motion raises issues much more serious to Members of this House than simply whether 21 days should or should not be given to private Members' Bills and Motions. For many years, I suppose, one of the principal features of our political history has been the decline of the private Member, and it is rather significant to notice the diminution in the proportion of private Members' Bills to Government Bills that have ultimately received the Royal Assent. Yesterday I looked at the figures, for the years 1895 to 1900, of Government Bills and private Members' Bills passed by this House. Striking an average over the whole of those six years, I find that on an average there were 45 Government Bills, that is public Bills, passed each Session, and 15 private Members' Bills. If you take the figures for the Session just completed you find that there were 59 Bills in all which received the Royal Assent, of which 51 were Government Bills and only eight were private Members' Bills. The eight is rather a higher number than we generally achieve nowadays in a Parliamentary Session. So only at the beginning of this century the proportion of private Members' Bills that passed was one in four, and now it is rather less than one in seven. When you take into account the enormously greater powers that can be exercised by Ministers without coming to Parliament at all, it is obvious by how much the margin of action of the Govern-

[Mr. Foot.]

ment through legislation and other means can exceed any action promoted by private Members.

I suggest in all seriousness that this progressive eclipse of the private Member is not only an inconvenient thing for us and our constituents, but is a very dangerous thing for the future of Parliamentary Government in this country. There are two reasons for that. First of all there are, of course, various reasons why Parliamentary government has survived in this country better or in a more unchanged form than in almost any country; but one of the principal reasons is to be found in the activities of private Members in this House. I suppose that almost all Members of the House under modern conditions pay frequent visits to their constituencies. They hear the grievances of their constituents, very often the individual grievances, and they are able to come up and place those grievances either before the Ministers in their Departments, or possibly, if they think fit, to raise them in the House of Commons. So we have got this position which has developed in recent years, especially as a result of all the social legislation we have had, that the private Member in fact acts as a sort of liaison officer between the electorate and the Governmental machine. It is a feature which has not grown up in any other Parliamentary country. I believe it has been a contributory factor to the stability of Parliamentary institutions in these Islands.

Secondly, I suppose all of us endeavour to explain to our constituents from time to time what is happening at Westminster, and when we get the chance we also endeavour to explain at Westminster what is happening in our constituencies. The second function of the private Member nowadays is to act as an interpreter between the governors and the governed. Those are two functions which the Member of Parliament performs in this country and which, I think, are not performed to anything like the same extent in any other country. If the Government are going to pass proposals of this kind, not to deal with an immediate situation but to cover the whole of a Parliamentary Session, it inevitably follows that the Government are going to diminish the opportunities, the authority and the usefulness of the private Member.

I am not one of those who take the view that there has been a very substantial decline in the prestige of Parliament. I believe that the authority of Parliament, and the regard in which it is held by the majority of electors, is very much greater still than many people imagine. But we ought not to blind ourselves to the fact that there are certain criticisms which are advanced, and legitimately advanced, of the working of Parliament at the present time. The most frequent criticism, which is heard not only at public meetings but from the man in the street, is that Members of this House are far too much under the control of the party Whips. The old gibe with which we are all familiar, which is referred to in the sentry's song in "Iolanthe," no doubt expressed some part of public opinion at that time. It certainly expresses what a great many people are thinking now. There are very many people who have come to visualise this House as a place where Members are driven into the Lobby like flocks of sheep, the Patronage Secretary acting as sheep-dog in chief. That is one of the most dangerous criticisms advanced against Parliamentary institutions to-day.

If we pass this Motion and if we destroy for a whole Session the opportunity of the private Member to raise subjects in which he and his constituents are interested, then inevitably we increase that feeling and add strength to that particular criticism. The main reason why Members from all political parties oppose this Motion is that, after all, it marks a further stage in the progressive subjugation of the Legislature to the Executive. Hon. Members opposite who follow the lead of the right hon. Member for Epping—I do not see many of them in their places—have coined a phrase "Yes Ma'am" I think it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Darwen (Sir H. Samuel) who christened this Parliament a "rubber stamp Parliament." That particular tendency, though it may be unusually marked in this Parliament, is not confined to this Parliament alone. I think it has appeared in almost all the Parliaments that have sat here since the War.

The modern idea appears to be that the House of Commons is here merely to register the decrees of the omnipotent Cabinet of the day. I submit that the duties of Parliament are not confined

merely to pronouncing verdicts upon the legislation proposed by the Government that happens to be in power. There are two other functions which are quite as important. The first is that the House of Commons is a place where grievances can be raised and redress demanded, whether they be individual or collective grievances. Secondly, it is a place which is a national quorum, where the various opinions held in the country can be expressed and ventilated. It will be a bad day for this House if ever the people of this country come to feel that many of the subjects in which they are most deeply interested are never discussed in this House. It does not in the least matter if we are described as a talking shop, as long as we talk about those things in which the people outside are interested. When we leave the business of the Session to be decided by the Government, when it is for the Government alone to decide what Measures or questions shall be debated, then we automatically assume that they know better than we do what interests the public. I believe that any assumption of that kind would be a mistake.

Let me give two examples of private Members' Motions that were discussed last Session. There was a Motion brought forward by the hon. Member for Bridgeton (Mr. Maxton) on the subject of the widespread poverty. I believe that the speeches made on that Motion by Members in all quarters of the House aroused a great deal more interest in the country than the vast majority of Government Bills that were discussed last Session. An hon. Member on the Labour benches brought forward a Motion on the question of a retiring age in industry, and on that Motion we were able to discuss one of the vital questions of the future, the distribution of work and leisure. Most of us who represent industrial constituencies know that that question is one of the questions that profoundly interest the industrial electors. The only opportunity we had of discussing it was on a Resolution brought forward by a private Member. In addition to that there are large numbers of vital questions which for one reason or another will never be brought forward by the Government of the day, whatever party that Government happens to represent.

One of the hon. Members of the Labour party referred to the publication a few

years ago of the Lord Chief Justice's book, "The New Despotism." One of the gravest features at the present time—I have the assent to this statement of many Members in all parts of the House—is the enormous increase in bureaucratic powers. It is nearly seven years since the Lord Chief Justice issued his warning as to the dangers of the new despotism. Two years ago we had the report of a Committee on Ministers' Powers. That committee included Members of all parties. It was a very strong committee, and it made very definite recommendations as to what should be done to check the advance of bureaucratic powers in this country. Although two years have elapsed this House has not once had an opportunity of debating that report, and it never will have an opportunity if the initiative is to be left to the Government of the day. In these days all Government are far too much in the hands of their permanent officials to allow the discussion in this House of recommendations of that kind. The only opportunity we are ever likely to get of debating those highly important recommendations is if the matter is brought forward on a Resolution moved by a private Member.

We all realise the very heavy programme to be got through this Session, as in other Sessions, but I agree with some of my hon. Friends in the Conservative party in asking: Need all the time be taken? Is it not possible to wait until the India Bill has been drafted and put into our hands, and for the Government then to come, and, if necessary, to ask for some part of private Members' time to be given up? If we have to sacrifice either Fridays or Wednesdays I agree with other speakers that I would rather sacrifice the Fridays. I think it was Lord Balfour who said that he never admired private Members' legislation. But subjects of great interest to the public outside, subjects which would never be raised by the Government of the day are brought forward on Wednesday on private Members' Motions. I think we shall diminish the interest that the people outside take in the proceedings of this House, and that we shall be gradually whittling away the prestige and authority of this House, if we permit this Motion to be passed to-day.

5.15 p.m.

Sir W. DAVISON: This has been a remarkable Debate. It has been well-developed from all sides of the House, but with the exception of the speech of the hon. Member for Barnstaple (Sir B. Peto), there has not been a speech—since that of the right hon. Gentleman—the Mover in favour of the Motion. Appeals have been made from all quarters to the Prime Minister and the Government for what must appear to be very reasonable and small concessions, but with what response? Just as we were told recently when we asked for concessions in connection with a Bill creating greater facilities for gambling, "The Government have decided," so it appears again to-day that the Government have decided. That was the phrase with which we were met again and again during recent discussions by the Home Secretary. The Government have decided and whatever private Members in all parts of the House may think, the jack-boot of an enormous majority is to be placed on the necks of the Parliamentary representatives of the people.

When the Prime Minister began his speech to-day there can scarcely have been an eye in the House which was not suffused with tears. The right hon. Gentleman said that a most unpleasant task had been imposed upon him and that only a sense of sheer necessity made him move such a Motion. Then he went on to ask, could the Government postpone either the India Bill or necessary social legislation. The Prime Minister has probably studied logic more recently than I have. Years ago when I studied logic a premise of that kind was known as a *supposito falsu*. Those are not the alternatives before the House. It is quite absurd to say that either the India Bill or necessary social legislation must be postponed if the Government do not get this Motion. There is time available for both. As has been said, it is undesirable that, day after day, we should be engaged in pushing forward a complicated Measure of constitutional reform, such as we are told the India Bill will be. It is far better to have an interval here and there during which we can turn to matters in which the great bulk of the people are more interested, and about which they understand more than they do about India Constitutional Reform.

Such intervals provide a valuable safety valve. Tempers which may have become frayed or intellects which may have been jaded will then have opportunities of refreshing themselves, while we deal with such little measures of social legislation as may have been overlooked by this great Government of all the talents.

There is a much more serious grievance on the part of private Members in relation to this Motion. During my 16 years' experience of the House I have never known a Prime Minister to demand private Members' time for the discussion of a Bill which had not been introduced. What right has the Prime Minister to say that a Bill is to be introduced, that it will probably contain 300 Clauses, and that he must take private Members' time to deal with it? We do not know what is in the Bill yet. Unless Members of Parliament are to be mere ciphers, unless we are merely to register every whim and caprice of the Government of the day, we are entitled to see the Bill before agreeing to such a Motion. How otherwise can we make up our minds that the Bill is so complicated that private Members' time will be necessary for dealing with it? I say that it is prostituting the independence of private Members to say that before they have even seen the Bill they are to give up their privileges in this way.

Suppose that the Bill has 300 Clauses, a great many Clauses in a Bill of this kind will probably require no discussion at all. There will be Clauses dealing with constitutional matters which will be non-contentious. In connection with a new constitution, certain provisions will have to be made which will not be of a controversial nature and it is idle to suggest that there will be acute controversy on all 300 Clauses of the Bill. The Leader of the Opposition has pointed out that there have been far more controversial Measures in the past. There were such Measures as the Home Rule Bill and the Government of Ireland Bill, introduced at a time when there was talk of revolution at home unless they were passed. Also at that time there was a keen Opposition criticising every movement of the Government of the day. To-day we have heard that the Socialist and Liberal Oppositions are, generally speaking, well-disposed towards the India Bill and that they will give facilities for

its passage although they do not agree with all its proposals so far as they know what those proposals are to be. The Government are not in the same difficulty as previous Governments were in with regard to such Measures as the Home Rule Bill and the Government of Ireland Bill. Yet they propose to take private Members' time even before the Bill has been introduced.

I hope that the House will resist the present Motion. I hope that hon. Members will not only make speeches upon it as has been done to-day from every part of the House, but that they will go into the Lobby against this encroachment on private Members' privileges. This is more important than a mere question of a number of days being required. Parliament is one of the most precious institutions of the country, and if the prestige of Parliament is undermined we shall be on the high road to a dictatorship. Indeed it would appear that we are on the high road to dictatorship. I was amazed at the Prime Minister taking credit recently for the fact that this country had not fallen into the dictatorial habits adopted by other nations. What has happened is the last few weeks in this House? In the period between our re-assembly on 30th October and 18th November, I think I am right in saying that the Eleven o'clock Rule was suspended on every possible occasion, with perhaps one exception, in order to force certain matters through the House in the early hours of the morning and without proper discussion. I and some of my hon. Friends were interested in the particular Measure affected, and Amendments which we were told were merely drafting Amendments turned out to be so important that the Government had to take them back for further consideration. Had those Amendments not been considered, even in the late hours to which we were forced to sit, there would have been grave flaws in that Measure.

Then, on the last day before Prorogation we had an alteration of the Standing Orders meant to give the Government of the day more power. The Chairmen of Standing Committees are now to have the power of selecting Amendments presumably so as to force through Government Measures and further stifle discussion by private Members. The late Mr. T. P. O'Connor who was Father of the House, declared that legislation was

not the prime function of the House: that it was also the great inquest of the nation and the place where grievances could be stated. If we accept the idea that when the Government of the day decide to go forward with certain reforms as they call them, those Measures are to be pushed through regardless of private Members' rights, then it will mean the end of Parliamentary Government. Some man or some body of men will get up one day and declare, "We are not going to stand this. Parliament is no longer a place of debate and a place for the free expression of the people's will. It has simply become a method of authorising the decrees of dictators while preserving the semblance of Parliamentary form." When an issue of that kind is raised it will be the end of Parliament, and if the British Parliament is discredited, then Parliamentary Government throughout the world will be discredited. Finally, as the first business of this new Session, the Prime Minister, before any Bills have been introduced, announces that the Government have decided that all private Members' time must be taken. The point is a simple one. Far more important than any question of the number of days, is the question of the rights of private Members and the prestige of Parliament. It is the duty of every Member of Parliament to be jealous not only of his own reputation but of the reputation of Parliament as a whole and of the constituency he represents.

5.25 p.m.

MR. T. SMITH: The Prime Minister represents an industrial constituency in which, as in nearly every other industrial constituency, conditions at present are not too good. He knows that Members of the Labour party, whether they have been in Opposition or on the Government side of the House, have always used the private Members' time available to them for the purpose of calling attention to certain outstanding grievances affecting large sections of the population. If this Motion is carried it means that there will be no opportunities of doing so during the coming Session. On Supply Days we cannot discuss anything which involves new legislation and we have always looked to the Debates on Wednesdays and Fridays for opportunities of expressing our views on certain matters. An

[Mr. Smith.]

hon. Member behind me said that very few important Bills had been passed as a result of the initiative of private Members. During the last Session, however, there was one Bill which was very important, although not very big, dealing with workmen's compensation, and we had expected that in the coming Session there would be an opportunity of introducing a further Bill dealing with workmen's compensation in order to call attention to what is taking place in the country. The Prime Minister knows that there are tens of thousands of people to-day who are totally incapacitated and yet are receiving as low as 21s. a week compensation. Many of them are compelled to go to the Poor Law authorities to get the means to live. The right hon. Gentleman ought to know that there is a great volume of opinion in the country in favour of new legislation on workmen's compensations.

I want the right hon. Gentleman to be in a position to tell his constituents, when he is asked when the Government are going to deal with this matter, that as head of the Government he has deprived us of the opportunity even of discussing the matter in the House of Commons. I pay this tribute to the right hon. Gentleman, that he has always taken a keen interest in the Miners Minimum Wage Act. In 1912 I happened to be at the Miners Conference when the right hon. Gentleman came over to the Westminster Palace Hotel from this House and gave us his views on the Minimum Wage Bill then before the House. Whether he knows it or not, that Act has been a most important piece of legislation to the coal-fields. Indeed I regard it as one of the most important things done for the miner for a number of years. But experience has shown that it is in need of revision and I want the Prime Minister also to be in a position to state to a mining audience at Seaham that, even though they are suffering from low wages, even though the Minimum Wage Act needs revision, he has deprived us of the opportunity of discussing those grievances in the House. That is the truth and I challenge the right hon. Gentleman with regard to it. I was impressed with his interest in this matter in 1912. I would go further and say that if the right hon. Gentleman consulted his real opinion, he

would say himself that the Act needs to be amended. There has just been an arbitrators award in South Wales which will not give 8d. a day advance in some cases, and in some cases would mean 7s. or 8s. for seven and a-half hours underground.

Have we who have been sent here from mining localities to be refused permission to discuss these matters here? The right hon. Gentleman ought to be ashamed of himself in certain respects. There is another aspect that I want him to remember. Time after time, on Wednesday evenings in particular, mining Members have put down Motions dealing with accidents in mines, and surely the right hon. Gentleman will regard that subject as of importance and will agree with me when I say that the accident rate is far too high in the mines of this country. When the statistics are out at the end of this year, we shall find that there have been at least 1,000 fatal accidents in the mines this year. The Secretary for Mines, only a few days before the Gresford disaster, wrote an article in which he said, "Thank heaven, the day of big explosions is over." A few days later we had Gresford, with its 201 fatalities. There is an inquiry taking place into that disaster, and therefore I cannot comment upon it, except to say that as a result of that inquiry, we on these benches may want an opportunity to show that new legislation is needed to deal with underground conditions. I think the inquiry, when finished, will show that after the experience of the Coal Mines Regulation Act, from 1911 to 1931, there is room for new legislation dealing with certain aspects of the matter, but we shall be debarred from discussing it in this House because the Government are taking all the private Members' time.

The PRIME MINISTER *indicated dissent.*

MR. SMITH: The Prime Minister is a most curious individual. He shakes his head at almost everything, and says "No, no, no," but I challenge him to show this House where, if we want to discuss any matter involving new legislation, we can do so if this Motion is carried. He knows that on Supply days we cannot discuss matters involving new legislation, and he also knows that the Estimates for the Mines Department are brought in usually at about a quarter past eight in the even-



ing and that there is not more than two hours' discussion on them. I, therefore, submit that we on these benches cannot allow this Motion to go through without protest. As the hon. Member for Dundee (Mr. D. Foot) said, Parliament ought to be made the place for ventilating grievances, and even if you do not get them remedied, you at least partially satisfy the people outside who have the grievances, in so far as you are able to give them a ventilation of their point of view. I appeal to the Prime Minister to reconsider this Motion. There has scarcely been a speech in this House to-day from his own side in favour of it, and if the right hon. Gentleman cannot agree to restore the Fridays, let him at least allow Wednesday evenings to continue to be utilised for the discussion of matters of importance raised by private Members.

5.24 p.m.

Mr. CHARLES WILLIAMS: Everyone who heard the extraordinarily able speech of the hon. Member for Dundee (Mr. D. Foot) must realise that this process of gradually whittling away the powers of private Members is a thing which the House of Commons has to face. It is a matter of supreme importance that Members of this House should be able to maintain direct contact between their constituents and the Executive of the day. The old idea that Parliament was mainly for the purpose of criticising the Executive has gone, but there was a great deal in that idea, and I would appeal to the Government to look at this question not merely from the point of view of the Government and the Opposition. When you have a particularly weak Opposition—weak, that is, in numbers—it is still more important that the ordinary private Members' rights should be preserved in every way, but I hope that the proposition of the Leader of the Opposition, that the Government should agree not to do anything in this matter for, say, a month, will not be accepted, because it is essential that the Government should make up their minds and act. Surely, however, the Government might give a certain number of evenings or Fridays, distributed over a wide period, not just for a month or two—say, every other Wednesday evening—when we could ballot for Motions bringing forward matters of real importance. Instead of a ballot, I would rather have

a Motion with the names of 50 Members behind it, and give each Member one vote in the Session to do that, and that only. I believe that by that method you might get a series of Debates of immense value.

I realise the difficulty of the time-table, and I think the Prime Minister is extraordinarily optimistic if he thinks he will get the India Bill through, as well as the other Measures that he mentioned, in 43 days. It is essential that the Indian Measure in particular should be given the widest possible discussion in this House, and it would be a very bad thing, here, in the country, and overseas, if that Measure were in any way obstructed or closed or if the Debate upon it were curtailed. If there were any idea of doing that, I would rather sacrifice all private Members' time than have that happen. The Prime Minister said that this Motion was not the fault of the Government. At any rate, it is not the fault of the private Members, but it is the private Members who are to be punished. Supposing the Cabinet in their wisdom had said that, instead of rising somewhere towards the end of July, we should sit and take these important Measures, as we did the other day, and put them on the Statute Book, and should then come back in the middle of October, or whatever date they might choose, they would have had a considerable amount of opinion behind them. Although I am not an expert, I know that there is a widespread feeling in this House that the Government are making a great tactical blunder in not proceeding on those lines.

You have some independence in this House, and if you happen on these occasions to say what you think on behalf of the private Members, it is no good saying it unless you say exactly what is in your mind. The Government are gradually whittling away the private Members' time and powers. Further, every time they suspend the Eleven o'Clock Rule, they take away from the private Member, between 11 and 11.30, a very valuable occasion on which to debate grievances, and if the Government will make no other concession and give no other assurance, I would like them to say that they will do everything in their power at least to see that they do not suspend the Eleven o'Clock Rule more than is absolutely necessary. I would like

[Mr. Williams.]

them to agree to restrict the suspension of the Eleven o'Clock Rule so that private Members would have at least two days a week preserved to them. Also, if the Government possibly could, I wish they would meet the House on this occasion not necessarily by giving time for private Members' Bills, but at any rate by giving some days between now and July for the discussion of matters which a considerable block of Members might think of importance.

I would emphasise one further point. The country realises how ill-balanced this House of Commons is. It is very bad to take away the rights of one section of the House, namely, the Opposition, but with the lack of balance that you have to-day in the House, if you take away from 400 or 500 Members the power which they have enjoyed for many generations—misused sometimes, but used well at others—and do that right at the beginning of the Session, you are doing something which will definitely weaken Parliament in the eyes of the country, because you are saying that we have not the capacity to come here and put our points clearly to the Government. When you have a Parliament which is so unbalanced and one-sided as this Parliament is, you should do everything in your power to encourage the initiative of the private Member, so that that initiative may in due course have its effect upon the Government of the day.

5.42 p.m.

Mr. PETHERICK: I am in substantial agreement with almost everything that the hon. Member for Torquay (Mr. C. Williams) has said. The hon. Member for South-West Bethnal Green (Sir P. Harris) said he did not think the Prime Minister had made out his case for refusing private Members any day for ballots and Motions, but I think the right hon. Gentleman did make out his case for his 108 days. I agree that those 108 days will be very fully occupied, but at the same time I do not think it is wise to ask private Members of this House to forgo all their rights in this connection. The right hon. Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) indicated that he was very disappointed with the private Members of this House, and particularly, I understood, with Members of the Conservative party who are supporting the Govern-

ment. He indicated that we go through the Lobbies like a lot of sheep and do not listen very much to the Debates. I should, however, like to point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, if we are sheep, we have the privilege, unusual perhaps among sheep, of choosing our own shepherd; and I believe that it is possible for private Members to bring effective criticism to bear upon the Government. The hon. Member for South Kensington (Sir W. Davison) made a very interesting speech, and I am sure the Government will be particularly pleased with his assurance to them of a rapid passage for the Government of India Bill.

I think it is unwise to ask us to-day to forgo all our rights with regard to Bills and Motions. Various hon. Members have pointed out that very valuable and interesting subjects are often discussed on Wednesdays, and that frequently valuable Measures for the reform of existing legislation are passed through as the result of Bills introduced on Fridays. There is a large number of what I may call crank Bills, or at least very controversial Bills, which are talked out and which do in effect waste time, but some very useful private Members' Bills have been passed, and I was myself instrumental in passing one reform of an existing anomaly. I believe that the Government have latterly been asking a little too much of their supporters. During the passage of the Betting and Lotteries Act we were asked to support all the various Government Amendments and the Bill itself. I have talked to dozens of my friends in the House of Commons and I have found only two who were in agreement with the Bill as a whole and thought it ought to have been introduced. The Government asked our support of this Measure and by doing so created considerable discontent among their own supporters.

Latterly there has been growing up what I think is a rather unfortunate tendency on the part of the Government, namely, a tendency to look upon the House of Commons as consisting of the Government and the Opposition, whereas it consists of the Government and its supporters, and the Opposition. I have often noticed during the short time that I have been in the House that some of the best criticisms of Governmental action, frequently leading to change in the project of the Government, have been

levelled, not by the official Opposition or the Liberal Opposition, but by Conservative back bench Members. It is imprudent to ignore the private Member and to give the impression to the country that the Government are able to carry any Measure they like to force through the House, and that the only criticism that will in fact be listened to will be that which comes from the Opposition benches.

I ask the Prime Minister whether he can possibly consider a suggestion I wish to make. He admitted that the 108 days will be fully taken up. Would it not be possible to allot a few days to private Members and to carry on the Session, if necessary, a little longer into August, or to give a certain amount of time in October or in September when we come back from the Summer Recess? That would give the impression to the country that the Government do not wish to dragoon the House of Commons, that they have sympathy with the rights of private Members, and that they believe that the rights of private Members should be upheld. Such a concession would, I feel, go far to allay the alarm and the discontent, not only in the country, but among the Government supporters in the House.

5.48 p.m.

Mr. HOLFORD KNIGHT: I am sorry to have to detain the House for a few minutes, but I happen to be particularly interested in the matter which is before us, because I have been concerned in the last five years with a number of private Bills, some of which have been passed into law. My present proximity to my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) must not imply concurrence with his views. I am bound to say that, on a review of the business which the Government are proposing to deal with during the coming Session, I think that some such Motion as this is necessary, for the business will require a great deal of time. The main object of the Government, the India Bill, is of special constitutional importance. Those of us whose recollections can go back far enough will remember that the first ministerial act of my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping was to introduce the Government of Transvaal Act in 1906, and that took some time. The last Government of India Act took a good deal of time, and it is therefore right

for the Government to anticipate that they will require a good deal of time during the coming Session for the India Bill.

Allowing that the Government really want a great deal of time, however, this proposal will cut away the whole of the opportunities of private Members during the coming Session. I suggest to the Prime Minister that there is an area of legislation which waits and waits because no Government can take it up. It may be of a highly controversial nature, but it is none the less desirable. No Government can take it up, and it is unreasonable to expect them to take up that sort of legislation unless the volume of public opinion is so insistent that they are compelled to do so. There is not a Member of the House who has not received numerous communications about the matter to which I would like to refer in passing as illustrating the submission I am making. There have been 20 years' delay in giving effect to the recommendations of a Royal Commission in regard to matrimonial matters, and it has resulted in an accumulation of private grievances of an amazing character. I am not using the language of exaggeration when I say that the knowledge that the House is to be deprived of legislative opportunities for dealing with these matters for nearly another year will strike terror and anger in hundreds of households. From that point of view I ask to be excused for the undue feeling which I show. I am sorry to see the hilarity on the face of the Dominions Secretary, for this is a very serious matter.

The SECRETARY of STATE for DOMINION AFFAIRS (Mr. J. H. Thomas): I was not smiling at the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. KNIGHT: The right hon. Gentleman is always smiling at something or other, and I was afraid he was smiling at me. Last year a similar Motion was made by the Lord Privy Seal, and it was pointed out to him that it would be fair to give the Government the time they desired if the Government would allow urgent private legislation to be considered if time remained on the conclusion of Government business. The right hon. Gentleman, in his genial way, said, "Most certainly, if there be time after our requirements are satisfied, it

[Mr. Knight.] will be reasonable for the House to proceed, if it desires, to private business."

What happened? This is no laughing matter, but I venture to say that no proceedings in this House caused more derision in the country than the proceedings to which I am about to refer. On certain days, when there was plenty of time to proceed with urgent private business, there were arranged "counts out"; and on one occasion on a Friday the House rose at 1.30 when the next Order on the Paper was the very Order to which I have referred. There were then ample opportunities for proceeding with it. Thanks to a vigilant Press, that circumstance was noted, and the House did not come out of it very well. If on Fridays Government business be completed at a time at which it is possible to go on with private Members' business, may we ask the Government seriously to consider, when this system has been tried, making some sort of amendment to the present proposal? Otherwise, I am bound to say with the greatest regret that a Government which allows an accumulation of serious grievances not covered by Government legislation, a Government which takes the whole time for practically a year and leaves these accumulated grievances untouched, is taking a responsibility which I am sorry to see the National Government take.

5.35 p.m.

Earl WINTERTON: I would like to support the Government on this Motion, although with very great regret. No private Member can see a proposal of so far-reaching a character as this and support it except with regret. At the same time, I think the arguments, in favour of the course which the Government have taken on the whole outweigh those against it. In the first instance, there is the matter of time. In view of the programme which the Government are putting before the House, it seems a matter of sheer physical necessity to take private Members' time if that programme is to be fulfilled. I am not going to say that in all respects the management of business by the Government has been happy. For example, we are told that a good deal of time will have necessarily to be devoted to the Bill which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Health is bringing in on the subject of overcrowding. Overcrowding

was just as bad at the time the last Rent Restrictions Act was brought in as it is to-day—no less and no greater—and had the question been comprehensively dealt with at that time there would not now be the necessity to bring in an overcrowding Bill.

Although I think it would be out of order to refer to the matter on this occasion, I would like to give my support—and I suppose support would come from all parts of the House—to the proposal which was put forward by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook (Mr. Amery) that this and all other Governments in similar circumstances should have a policy committee, or some committee which would try to co-ordinate the business which they bring before Parliament. The method of dealing with legislation, I consider, without making accusations against those responsible for legislation, is ragged. We have one Bill after another dealing with the same subject. No sooner is one Bill passed than a Minister comes forward and says that another Bill is necessary. That applies to other Governments as well as to this Government. In the past subjects may not have been so big as they are to-day, but I cannot help having a feeling at the back of my mind—I do not want to make an attack on my two congenial right hon. Friends who lead the House—that in the past leaders of Governments managed their business better than the present leaders.

The second reason why I am prepared to support the Government is that, frankly, I wish to support them if, as I hope will be the case, they adopt the proposals of the Committee whose report has been placed on the Table to-day. If they do adopt those proposals, no doubt the time which will be taken up by a consideration of them will certainly not be less than that mentioned by the Prime Minister—although I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman has made rather a precedent by giving an argumentative point to my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) by announcing the exact number of Clauses which will appear in the Bill.

The PRIME MINISTER: I said about 200. It is not an exact number.

Earl WINTERTON: I am glad to have that assurance. We may take it, then,

that the Government have not finally made up their minds in regard to the form of the Bill. The third reason why I am supporting the Government is that there has been a failure by private Members to take full advantage of the time offered to them. I do not think that that failure is wholly explained away by the circumstances to which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Nottingham (Mr. Knight) referred. I certainly share any indignation which he may have if at any time the official Whips or anyone else attempted to obtain a "count out" of the House when business could have been brought on in which he and others were interested. I do not know whether that be so or not. In justice to the Whips it must be remembered that a count out is possible only when fewer than 40 Members are willing to come in and take part in the proceedings, and if private Members are not ready to support their colleagues who bring forward Bills, even if they are in disagreement with them, the whole of the blame cannot be placed on the Whips. The fact, and it is a notorious fact, that private Members have not on all occasions taken full advantage of the time given does not afford real ground for saying that the time given to private Members under modern conditions must always be valueless and unfructuous. I do not think that is so at all.

I very much regret that the Government and, as far as I know, the House as a whole, are not willing to accept proposals which were placed before the Procedure Committee which sat in the last Parliament by a number of those who have been Members of this House for some years—by my Noble Friend the Member for Hastings (Lord E. Percy), by, I think, my Noble Friend the junior Member for Oxford University (Lord H. Cecil), and certainly by myself. We suggested that there should be provided what I may call an *ad hoc* occasion for private Members to raise grievances, provided they were substantial and not merely personal ones, or to bring to the attention of the House and the Government some subject of immediate and live interest which is agitating the public and the Press outside, but which has not been discussed in this House except at Question Time.

We were told by one or two distinguished pressmen, including at least one well-known figure in what may be called—I must not define it too closely—press circles in this House, that it would be a real aid to those newspapers which do their best in face of considerable difficulty to give fair space and fair attention to Debates in this House if the House would debate matters when they are of live and immediate interest. Those experts whom we consulted pointed out that again and again a question arose quite suddenly, as questions do in these exciting, critical times in which we live, and that unless the Opposition asked for a day for a Vote of Censure, or unless it happened that there was a Supply Day on which the matter could be raised, it might not be discussed in this House for weeks and weeks, save by question and answer.

What happens? All the critical people outside the House—and there are quite a large number of them; there is almost a conspiracy to suggest that this House is worn out and useless—take advantage of this opportunity to renew their criticism. They say, "Here is a live question which every one is talking about, and what is the House talking about? Some pettifogging matter in which no one outside feels any interest." As far as I know, every other democratic House which is at all comparable to ours has that system, which may be called the interpellation system. They certainly have it in the French Chamber, and in the American House of Representatives and in the Senate. It could be quite well arranged here without taking from the Government any undue amount of time or occupying more time than is given up now. It would be out of order to elaborate now the proposal which was put before the Procedure Committee, but we suggested that on two or three days a week, immediately after questions, there should be a Debate of not more than half-an-hour or 40 minutes when such matters as I have indicated could be discussed in a way in which they never can be discussed by question and answer. The Government themselves are beginning to realise this, because there has grown up the extraordinary innovation of a Minister, at the end of questions, and by leave of the House, because there is no provision for it under the Rules, making a long statement; but

[Earl Winterton.] when he has made his statement it is not possible for Mr. Speaker to give permission to hon. Members to discuss it, and sometimes it is not even possible for them to ask questions. What I suggest could be perfectly well done—though I think the majority would probably not agree with me in this—by taking away some of the opportunities which private Members now have to ask questions. If it would enable the Government to grant this concession I would reduce Question Time by a quarter of an hour. That proposal would have the effect of bringing to bear on the Government the weight—which they could accept or reject—of the collective view of the House.

There is another point which I wish to bring forward, and in doing so I need hardly say that I make no reflection on Mr. Speaker or any previous occupant of the Chair. When I first came into Parliament 30 years ago the step of moving the Adjournment on matters of definite and urgent public importance was resorted to to a far greater extent than it is to-day. When the then Leader of the House—I forget whether it was Mr. Gladstone or Sir William Harcourt—brought forward the Standing Order in question, he explained that it was intended to prevent the abuse of the Adjournment Motion to which a certain party no longer represented in the House had resorted when they were obstructing the general business of the House. But at the same time—and this is the important point—he made it clear that it was not intended to take away from the House the right of discussing urgent matters. Anyone who looks over the number of occasions on which the Adjournment has been successfully moved in the last 10 or 15 years and compares it with the first 20 years after the Rule was brought in will see that there has been a very great change indeed. [Interruption.] My right hon. Friend the Member for Antrim (Sir H. O'Neill) has raised a rather delicate point. I am merely calling attention to the change. I think that something along the lines which I have suggested will have to be done if the great body of private Members are to retain both the right and the obligation which they have of bringing matters of importance to the notice of the Government. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will not be able to give

me a detailed answer on the point on this occasion, but I hope the Government will give sympathetic consideration to it.

6.8 p.m.

The LORD PRESIDENT of the COUNCIL (Mr. Baldwin): I listened, as always, with great interest to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Earl Winterton), for he has a longer experience of this House than most of us, and has always taken a great interest in its Procedure, especially from the point of view of the private Member. There is always a certain amount of unreality about these Debates because any of us who have either led the House or the Opposition have spoken on either side and indiscriminately; and the Leader of the Labour party who, whatever we may think about him, is an extremely honest man in this House, said last night that it was because he feels so strongly on this matter that he would vote against the Motion; but he added, what few men in his position would have said, "Though I am bound to say I am doing the opposite of what I should do if I were sitting on the opposite side of the House."

My right hon. Friend the Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) has been seen in many capacities during his life, and is sometimes a little apt to forget some of the earlier episodes in his brilliant career. I may remind him and the House that in the last 15 years the whole time of private Members has been taken on four occasions, and on three of those occasions he and I were both Members of the Government that took it—in 1921, 1922 and 1928. Four times the private Members have had their time untouched, virginal and unsullied; but in all the other seven years a certain amount of time has been taken away, sometimes more and sometimes less. All the same I can assure hon. Members that, as all of us have been private Members in our time, we do sympathise with and understand the Debates that take place on these occasions and we rejoice that they should take place, because it is only right that they should. When a Government has to take this grave step it is quite right that it should be challenged, and that its action should be justified, and that is what I hope to do.

There was one matter to which the Prime Minister alluded when speaking of all the business before the House to which

I wish to refer, because he did not make this particular point. In the Gracious Speech it is stated that "if time permits" we are going to deal with so-and-so. There is one very important Bill which has that consideration implied and attached to it, and that is a Bill for dealing with what, I think, is a most urgent and difficult matter—the problem of ribbon development. I think it is essential that the House should get down to that question. But I just say that by the way. I would say something on another point raised, I believe, by the hon. and learned Member for South Nottingham (Mr. Knight), and the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. T. Smith). They are naturally very apprehensive that when all the time of private Members is taken they may find themselves barred from raising questions of great interest to them and, possibly, of great interest to a much wider circle in the community. I recognise that fact, but I would point out that there are certain occasions when subjects can be raised. They can be brought up on the four Adjournments which will come before Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, and the Summer. They can be raised on the Consolidated Fund Bill, and also on the Appropriation Bill.

Sir P. HARRIS: Nothing involving legislation can be raised, surely?

Mr. BALDWIN: I am coming to that. That is a good point, and it is quite true. That leads to what I was going to say. With the Patronage Secretary I have been most carefully through every day to the end of July or the beginning of August to examine the business, and we have set aside a few days for such contingencies as the discussion of matters of real importance, if the Opposition or anyone will approach the Patronage Secretary on the point. We are perfectly prepared to give, I cannot say at the moment how many days—it will depend entirely on how the other business goes—but we have not shut our eyes to that point, and we realised the importance of it.

Mr. WALTER REA: Will not they necessarily be Votes of Censure?

Mr. BALDWIN: Oh, no; certainly not. That is another thing. I would like to say one word about a point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham and the point raised by the hon. Member for

Dundee (Mr. D. Foot). The hon. Member for Dundee was pointing out—and I take it from him, because I have not looked the matter up—that 40 years ago there was more Private Bill legislation than there is to-day, and my right hon. Friend was saying that he thought the business of the House was less well managed now than it was a good many years ago. Whether that be the case or not, the House has to remember how the whole circumstances of legislation have changed. I remember very well the late Lord Balfour saying to me that the work of a Cabinet Minister was three times as great as it was when he first took office in the middle eighties. That is true, to a certain extent all round, it is certainly true of Ministers. At the time of which he was speaking it was an unusual thing to have an Autumn Session, and at an earlier period still there were no Autumn Sessions at all. The work that is thrust upon the House has increased and is increasing, for the very simple reason that the bigger the electorate gets, when the legislature is in close connection with the electorate, and the more the electorate wants done, the more the legislature are prepared to do. Therefore, the work of this House must increase. I confess I was sorry at the observation of my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping about the Prime Minister's absence from this House so much. He will remember the Government which he and I were in for a very short time together in 1921, and that the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Carnarvon Boroughs (Mr. Lloyd George) never led this House. I believe that it will be almost an impossibility, as I have said more than once, for Prime Ministers in future to lead this House in addition to all the other work that they have to do. That, of course, is rather beside the question.

Why are we asking for this Motion? It is difficult, as I know from experience, for a private Member, or for a Member who has not had experience of office, to get it out of his head that when the Government move a Motion like this it is all very fine for them, and that they do not mind whether they move it or not; they do not bother about the private Member, and it is all the same to them whether they have it or not. That is not at all the case. Any one of us who has to move this Motion dislikes it exceedingly. Let me ask hon. Members to exercise their

[Mr. Baldwin.]

imaginations for one moment. To Members of a Ministry, especially to those who have to attend the House a good deal, it is worth anything to get Wednesdays and Fridays. On the other days of the week it is impossible for Ministers to go out to dinner—that I never do when the House is sitting—or to take some recreation of that kind, or something more exciting than that. So, it is not for our own satisfaction that we do this; we would far rather not do it.

As I said a few minutes ago, I have been through every day, from to-day to the end of July, with my right hon. Friend, and I can give the House my word that every moment of that time is wanted. It is mainly wanted for a reason which has, as usual, been put in much better words than I could possibly put it by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Epping, who is an orator while I am not. I recall what he said on 16th February, 1911, when the Government took all the time of private Members up to Easter because of the Parliament Bill, which was very small—an infant in arms—compared with the India Bill. He supported the Motion on this ground:

“If ever there was a question on which the private Members have a right to say that they have been consulted it is upon this question of the Parliament Bill, for the sake of which this serious sacrifice is demanded of them.”—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 16th February, 1911; col. 1369, Vol. 21.]

I say that that is true to the “th degree of the India Bill. It is quite true that it is impossible to say how long that Bill will take and how long we shall require. That is what I want to tell the House, and what I feel as one who is very largely responsible for the conduct of business in this House. The Prime Minister has just mentioned the figure of 300. That is within 100, one way or the other. It will be a very long Bill, and from its character no more important Bill will ever have been debated in this House. I am most anxious that the Second Reading, for instance, shall be such as will give ample opportunity for everyone who desires to speak on the principles of the Bill. There will be it may be a dozen or it may be a score of important questions of principle in the Bill, apart from the details, and it will be my desire that all those questions shall have every liberty for discussion,

that no one may feel that on these important matters discussion will be curtailed. I believe that to be of great importance. I want to see the utmost freedom of discussion on the Bill when it is produced, with the single proviso that the Bill must get through.

Mr. CHURCHILL: By 31st July?

Mr. BALDWIN: I would not answer that. What I am clear about is that the Bill must not be left for an indefinite period, because that would be bad both for this country and for India. Finality is required. If we are to do that, we must have every minute of the time, and that, I assure the House, will not be too much. For the last two years private Members have had their full rights without the loss of a single evening or Motion. I regret profoundly, both on general principles and for my own comfort, that this Motion has to be moved, but, believe me, if the work is to be accomplished, if we are to make good work of this India Bill, and if we are to accomplish the other Measures in the Gracious Speech, every minute of this time will be required, and not one minute less will suffice.

6.21 p.m.

Sir EDWARD GRIGG: May I ask the Lord President of the Council a question? He made a very welcome statement that it might be possible to find a certain number of days for the discussion of special subjects, if the programme allowed. It is said that that would be some compensation for private Members' time being taken. May I ask whether consideration will be given, when those days are in question, to the desire of supporters of the Government to discuss their questions? They proportionately are sacrificing more than anybody else in this sacrifice of private Members' time, and I hope consideration will be given to any reasonable number of Government supporters, if they ask for a day.

Earl WINTERTON: May I ask whether it will be possible to carry out what my right hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham (Sir E. Grigg) has asked for? If, say, 250 or 300 Members ask for a discussion, will it be possible to get round this Motion and to seek the opinion of the House in that way?

6.22 p.m.

Mr. LANSBURY: I can only speak again with your permission, Mr. Speaker, and with that of the House. As I understand the proposal of the Lord President of the Council, it is a new and novel one in the procedure of the House. It is that we shall depart from the usual method of private Members' days and so on, and adopt instead the proposal of the Noble Lord the Member for Horsham (Earl Winterton).

Earl WINTERTON: Oh, no.

Mr. LANSBURY: Not exactly, but as I understand it that in principle is the proposition of the Lord President of the Council, and I enter a very mild protest against that being settled to-day before we have had some further consultation in the ordinary way as to what is going on. My hon. Friends, of all people, do not wish to stand in the way of free discussion without any question of censure, on big and important public questions. We shall come to the consideration of those questions in as friendly a manner as anyone, but we want the matter to be considered, before it is decided in this rather haphazard manner.

Mr. BALDWIN: I hope that hon. Members will not press me any more to-day. Communications can be made through the usual channels and we shall try to exercise our judgment, having regard to the limited time set aside, as to whether the matters are of general importance and are matters which the House as a whole would like discussed. Let us leave it like that. I believe that we can make the system work.

6.25 p.m.

Mr. MANDER: As I understand from the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill) that I am a supporter of the Government, I want in that capacity to ask the Lord President of the Council whether he has yet had time to look into the point which I raised last week, and which fits in well with the discussion which we are now having. In view of the fact that the Government are taking the whole of private Members' time, can he say whether the Government are now able to accept that recommendation of the Select Committee on Procedure which would enable private Members to have a full half hour on the Adjournment at Eleven o'Clock? That is of real importance now, as that will be one of the few opportunities that we shall have of ventilating some particular grievance. I hope that if the Lord President of the Council cannot give a definite undertaking now, he will do his best to give an answer at an early moment.

Mr. BALDWIN: I am sorry, but I cannot yet make any announcement. We are in consultation on the matter, and I hope before long we may be able to make a statement.

Sir A. SINCLAIR: May I ask you, Sir, whether this Motion, if passed, will affect the Standing Order under which the Adjournment of the House can be moved?

Mr. SPEAKER: It will not affect that in any way.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes, 224; Noes, 82.

Division No. 1.]

AYES.

[6.27 p.m.]

Adams, Samuel Vyvyan T. (Leeds, W.)
 Agnew, Lieut.-Com. P. G.
 Ainsworth, Lieut.-Colonel Charles
 Allen, Sir J. Sandeman (L'pool, W.)
 Anstruther-Gray, W. J.
 Aske, Sir Robert William
 Asheton, Ralph
 Ballie, Sir Adrian W. M.
 Baldwin, Rt. Hon. Stanley
 Barclay-Harvey, C. M.
 Beaumont, Hon. R. E. B. (Portsmouth, C.)
 Benn, Sir Arthur Shirley
 Bennett, Capt. Sir Ernest Nathaniel
 Barnays, Robert
 Boulton, W. W.
 Bower, Commander Robert Tation
 Bowyer, Capt. Sir George E. W.
 Broadbent, Colonel John
 Brocklebank, C. E. R.
 Browne, Captain A. C.
 Buchanan-Hepburn, P. G. T.
 Burgin, Dr. Edward Leslie

Burnett, John George
 Burton, Colonel Henry Walter
 Butler, Richard Austen
 Cadogan, Hon. Edward
 Campbell, Sir Edward Taswell (Brmly)
 Campbell, Vice-Admiral G. (Burnley)
 Campbell-Johnston, Malcolm
 Caporn, Arthur Cecil
 Carver, Major William H.
 Cazalet, Thelma (Islington, E.)
 Chapman, Sir Samuel (Edinburgh, S.)
 Clayton, Sir Christopher
 Cobb, Sir Cyril
 Cochrane, Commander Hon. A. D.
 Colville, Lieut.-Colonel J.
 Cooke, Douglas
 Cooper, A. Duff
 Courthope, Colonel Sir George L.
 Craddock, Sir Reginald Henry
 Critchley, Brig.-General A. C.
 Crooke, J. Smedley
 Crookshank, Capt. H. C. (Gainsboro)

Crossley, A. C.
 Davidson, Rt. Hon. J. C. C.
 Davies, Edward C. (Montgomery)
 Davies, Maj. Geo. F. (Somerset, Yeovil)
 Denman, Hon. R. D.
 Denville, Alfred
 Doran, Edward
 Drummond-Wolf, H. M. C.
 Dugdale, Captain Thomas Lionel
 Dunglass, Lord
 Elliot, Rt. Hon. Walter
 Ellis, Sir R. Geoffrey
 Elliston, Captain George Sampson
 Eimley, Viscount
 Emrys-Evans, P. V.
 Entwistle, Cyril Fullard
 Fleming, Edward Lascelles
 Fremantle, Sir Francis
 Fuller, Captain A. G.
 Galbraith, James Francis Wallace
 Gillett, Sir George Masterman
 Gilmour, Lt.-Col. Rt. Hon. Sir John

Glossop, C. W. H.
 Glyn, Major Sir Ralph G. C.
 Goldie, Noel B.
 Gower, Sir Robert
 Graves, Marjorie
 Grigg, Sir Edward
 Grimston, R. V.
 Guinness, Thomas L. E. B.
 Gunston, Captain D. W.
 Guy, J. C. Morrison
 Hamilton, Sir George (Ilford)
 Hammersley, Samuel S.
 Harbord, Arthur
 Haslam, Sir John (Bolton)
 Headlam, Lieut.-Col. Cuthbert M.
 Helffers, Captain F. F. A.
 Henderson, Sir Vivian L. (Chelmsford)
 Hillie, Major Rt. Hon. John Waller
 Hoare, Lt.-Col. Rt. Hon. Sir S. J. G.
 Hopkinson, Austin
 Hore-Bellisha, Leslie
 Hornby, Frank
 Horne, Rt. Hon. Sir Robert S.
 Horwbrugh, Florence
 Hudson, Capt. A. U. M. (Hackney, N.)
 Hudson, Robert Spear (Southport)
 Hume, Sir George Hopwood
 Hurd, Sir Percy
 Jackson, Sir Henry (Wandsworth, C.)
 Jones, Sir G. W. H. (Stoke New'ton)
 Ker, J. Campbell
 Kerr, Lieut.-Col. Charles (Montrose)
 Keyes, Admiral Sir Roger
 Kirkpatrick, William M.
 Knight, Holford
 Lamb, Sir Joseph Quinton
 Lambert, Rt. Hon. George
 Law, Richard K. (Hull, S.W.)
 Lees-Jones, John
 Liddell, Walter S.
 Lindsay, Noel Kor
 Lister, Rt. Hon. Sir Philip Cunliffe-
 Llewellyn, Major John J.
 Lloyd, Geoffrey
 Lockwood, John C. (Hackney, C.)
 Loftus, Pierce G.
 Lyons, Abraham Montagu
 Mabane, William
 McCorryquodale, M. S.
 MacDonald, Rt. Hon. J. R. (Seaham)
 Macdonald, Sir Murdoch (Inverness)
 Macdonald, Capt. P. D. (I. of W.)
 McEwen, Captain J. H. F.
 McKie, John Hamilton

McLean, Major Sir Alan
 McLean, Dr. W. H. (Tradeston)
 Macmillan, Maurice Harold
 Magnay, Thomas
 Margetson, Capt. Rt. Hon. H. D. R.
 Mason, Col. Glyn K. (Croydon, N.)
 Mayhew, Lieut.-Colonel John
 Meller, Sir Richard James
 Mills, Sir Frederick (Leyton, E.)
 Mills, Major J. D. (New Forest)
 Mitchell, Harold P. (Bristol & Chislewood)
 Molson, A. Hugh Etchdale
 Monsell, Rt. Hon. Sir S. Eyres
 Moore, Lt.-Col. Thomas C. R. (Ayr)
 Moore-Brabazon, Lieut.-Col. J. T. C.
 Moreing, Adrian C.
 Morris-Jones, Dr. J. H. (Denbigh)
 Morrison, William Shephard
 Moss, Captain H. J.
 Munro, Patrick
 Nation, Brigadier-General J. J. H.
 Nicholson, Rt. Hon. W. G. (Petersfield)
 Normand, Rt. Hon. Wilfrid
 Nunn, William
 O'Connor, Terence James
 O'Neill, Rt. Hon. Sir Hugh
 Ormsby-Gore, Rt. Hon. William G. A.
 Orr Ewing, I. L.
 Patrick, Colin M.
 Peake, Osbert
 Pearson, William G.
 Peat, Charles U.
 Peto, Sir Basil E. (Devon, Barnstaple)
 Peto, Geoffrey K. (Wolverhampton, Bliston)
 Powell, Lieut.-Col. Evelyn G. H.
 Pownall, Sir Assheton
 Procter, Major Henry Adam
 Pybus, Sir John
 Raikes, Henry V. A. M.
 Ramsay, T. B. W. (Western Isles)
 Rathbone, Eleanor
 Rawson, Sir Cooper
 Read, Arthur C. (Exeter)
 Reid, David D. (County Down)
 Reid, William Allan (Derby)
 Rickards, George William
 Ross Taylor, Walter (Woodbridge)
 Runciman, Rt. Hon. Walter
 Russell, Alexander West (Tynemouth)
 Russell, R. J. (Eddisbury)
 Rutherford, John (Edmonton)
 Rutherford, Sir John Hugo (Liverpool)
 Salmon, Sir Isidore
 Salt, Edward W.

Savery, Samuel Servington
 Seane, Lord
 Shakespeare, Geoffrey H.
 Shaw, Helen B. (Lanark, Bothwell)
 Shaw, Captain William T. (Forfar)
 Shute, Colonel J. J.
 Simmonds, Oliver Edwin
 Skelton, Archibald Noel
 Slater, John
 Smiles, Lieut.-Col. Sir Walter D.
 Smith, Sir Robert (Ab'd'n & K'dine, C.)
 Somervell, Sir Donald
 Somerville, D. G. (Willowden, East)
 Soper, Richard
 Southby, Commander Archibald R. J.
 Spence, Captain Richard A.
 Spender-Clay, Rt. Hon. Herbert H.
 Stanley, Rt. Hon. Lord (Fyde)
 Stanley, Rt. Hon. Oliver (W'morland)
 Stewart, J. Henderson (Fife, E.)
 Storey, Samuel
 Strauss, Edward A.
 Strickland, Captain W. F.
 Sueter, Rear-Admiral Sir Murray F.
 Tait, Mavis Constance
 Thomas, Rt. Hon. J. H. (Derby)
 Thomas, Major L. R. (King's Norton)
 Thompson, Sir Luke
 Thomson, Sir Frederick Charles
 Thorp, Linton Theodore
 Train, John
 Tree, Ronald
 Wallace, John (Dunfermline)
 Ward, Lt.-Col. Sir A. L. (Hull)
 Ward, Irene Mary Bewick (Wallsend)
 Warrander, Sir Victor A. G.
 Watt, Captain George Steven H.
 Wedderburn, Henry James Scrymgeour
 Whiteside, Borras Noel H.
 Whyte, Jardine Bell
 Willoughby de Eresby, Lord
 Wills, Wilfrid D.
 Wilson, Lt.-Col. Sir Arnold (Hertford)
 Wilson, Clyde T. (West Toxteth)
 Windsor-Clive, Lieut.-Colonel George
 Winterton, Rt. Hon. Earl
 Withers, Sir John James
 Womersley, Sir Walter
 Wood, Rt. Hon. Sir H. Kingsley
 Worthington, Dr. John V.

TELLERS FOR THE AYES.—
 Sir George Penny and Mr. Blinell.

NOES.

Addison, Rt. Hon. Dr. Christopher
 Atlee, Clement Richard
 Bailey, Eric Alfred George
 Banfield, John William
 Brown, C. W. E. (Notts., Mansfield)
 Buchanan, George
 Churchill, Rt. Hon. Winston Spencer
 Cooke, Frederick Seymour
 Curry, A. C.
 Daggar, George
 Davies, David L. (Pontypridd)
 Davies, Rhys John (Wentworthton)
 Davison, Sir William Henry
 Dobbie, William
 Edwards, Charles
 Emmott, Charles E. G. C.
 Evans, David Owen (Cardigan)
 Foot, Dingle (Dundee)
 Foot, Isaac (Cornwall, Bodmin)
 Gardner, Benjamin Walter
 George, Megan A. Lloyd (Anglesea)
 Grenfell, David Rees (Glamorgan)

Griffith, F. Kingsley (Middlesbrough, W.)
 Griffiths, George A. (York, W. Riding)
 Griffiths, T. (Monmouth, Pontypool)
 Gritten, W. O. Howard
 Hall, George H. (Merthyr Tydvil)
 Harris, Sir Percy
 Hicks, Ernest George
 Holdsworth, Herbert
 Jones, Henry Haydn (Merioneth)
 Jones, J. J. (West Ham, Silvertown)
 Jones, Morgan (Caerphilly)
 Kirkwood, David
 Lansbury, Rt. Hon. George
 Lawson, John James
 Llewellyn-Jones, Frederick
 Logan, David Gilbert
 Lunn, William
 McEntee, Valentine L.
 McKang, William
 Maclean, Neil (Glasgow, Govan)
 Macfaleu, Edward Lancelot
 Mander, Geoffrey le M.

Mason, David M. (Edinburgh, E.)
 Palling, Wilfred
 Parkinson, John Allan
 Rea, Walter Russell
 Roper, John R.
 Sinclair, Maj. Rt. Hon. Sir A. (C'thness)
 Smith, Tom (Normanton)
 Strauss, G. R. (Lambeth, North)
 Templeton, William P.
 Thorne, William James
 Tinker, John Joseph
 Wedgwood, Rt. Hon. Josiah
 West, F. R.
 White, Henry Graham
 Williams, Edward John (Ogmore)
 Williams, Dr. John H. (Llanelli)
 Wilmot, John
 Young, Ernest J. (Middlesbrough, E.)

TELLERS FOR THE NOES.—
 Mr. John and Mr. Groves.

Ordered,

"That, during the present Session, Government Business do have precedence at every Sitting."

Ordered,

"That no Notices of Amendments on going into Committees of Supply be given until after the Adjournment of the House for Christmas."—[The Prime Minister.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY.

KING'S SPEECH.

DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS.

[SECOND DAY.]

Order read for resuming adjourned Debate on Question [20th November]

"That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, as followeth:—

MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament."—[Mr. Noel Lindsay.]

Question again proposed.

6.37 p.m.

Mr. RHYS DAVIES: I rise to continue the Debate that was so excellently commenced yesterday by the two hon. Gentlemen on the Government side who moved and seconded the Motion. This is, I think, the fourteenth Speech from the Throne to which I have listened in this House, and I must confess that I am very disappointed with the document. I would venture to say that, when His Majesty read it yesterday, he delivered in effect the funeral oration of the National Government. Its paltry contents indicate clearly that the present Tory administration is suffering from political anaemia, and that the end of the present Government is already in sight.

The Prime Minister took part in the Debate yesterday. I have watched his efforts in this House on many occasions since he became Prime Minister of this Tory administration, and I would say, without wishing to be too unkind to him, that his remarks were petty, peevish, and indeed pointless to a degree. The Prime Minister's remarks yesterday, on this very notable occasion of the discussion on the King's Speech, left the people of the country absolutely bewildered as to what he meant, and it is, of course, not the first time that he has left them in bewilderment. I noticed in particular that the only cheers that he could raise in the House yesterday—remembering all the time his claims to be a Socialist—were from the other side, the die-hard

section of the Tory party, when he championed the increase of armaments in this country. I thought that that was really amazing. It shows that he has actually out-distanced the most reactionary Members of the present Government.

Before I pass to the theme on which I propose to dwell, I would venture to say a word on the paramount issue of peace. There has been a great deal of discussion on public platforms in the country, and on one or two occasions in the House of Commons, and hon. and right hon. Gentlemen on the other side of the House have attacked vehemently what is called the Ballot of the League of Nations' Union. The argument that they have used is that it is grossly unfair for some of us—and on this question, by the way, I speak as an avowed pacifist—that it is grossly unfair to us to exploit the pacifist emotions of the people of this country in favour of that Ballot of the League of Nations' Union. That appears to me like condemning a poor fellow who is suffering from consumption, because he desires more sunlight and fresh air. The attitude of some hon. Members appears to be that peace is not a natural thing at all—that in the very nature of the case we must prepare for war at some time, and that we must not therefore urge people to desire peace, as we are doing in connection with this ballot.

My object in rising this afternoon, however, is not so much to dwell upon peace, or war, or the Prime Minister, or the National Government, but to make an attempt once again to bring the county of Lancashire before the notice of the Government. Whatever my nationality may be, I have the honour to represent a Lancashire constituency in the House of Commons, and, like another Welshman in this House, I am, when it suits the purpose, an Englishman in politics. I have never been able to understand the present Government's attitude of mind towards the economic conditions in the several parts of this country. First of all they called for a survey of Scotland, especially of the Glasgow area, of the Tyne area and Durham, and of South Wales. They also asked—I think it was at their instigation—for a survey of the conditions both on Merseyside and in the whole of Lancashire outside Merseyside; but they came to the conclusion—how they did so I fail to understand—

[Mr. Davies.]

that they would study further the four areas of South Wales, Scotland, the Tyne and Cumberland, and they dropped Merseyside and the rest of Lancashire entirely out of their consideration. They sent gentlemen, members of the Tory party, to those four other areas, they have issued a report, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer stood at that Box the other day and said that they were going to do something to help these four areas. Whatever I may say to-day in trying to bring Lancashire into this picture, it must not be taken for granted for the moment that I accept the proposals of the Government as adequate for these depressed areas.

Before I proceed to attempt to bring the County of Lancashire into the mind of the Government let me first bring a very small point to the notice of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster issued a report about Cumberland, and I want to correct an inference in the first paragraph of his report, where he states that the money for this survey of Cumberland was found in Cumberland itself. This survey cost at least £1,000, but only about £30 of it was found in Cumberland. I am sure that that ought to be said for the purposes of accuracy. I think Members of all parties are very much indebted to these gentlemen in the Universities who have brought these excellent surveys in such a splendid way before the country. I would ask the Ministry of Labour if it will consider financing the continuation of this survey and bring it right up to date, for this reason. Conditions in South Wales are more or less static. I think they are static in most of the coal mining districts, but the changes that have taken place in Lancashire have been so swift during the last two years that I would urge the Government to arrange to bring the survey right up to date, and finance it as well. There should be no difficulty about funds in carrying on this very excellent work.

Now let me come to the position as I see it. The first thing that occurs to the mind of the uninitiated is this: What is the measurement that the Government put down in order to find out what is a depressed area? They are satisfied that South Wales is one. I do not begrudge what they do for South Wales or Scot-

land or any other part, but I want to find out the rule whereby they measure what is a depressed area. I think they have ignored some of the factors in the life of Lancashire in connection with this question of depression. The population of Durham is about 1,500,000, of Cumberland, 263,000, Glamorganshire 1,250,000 and Monmouthshire 434,000. One would imagine from the spokesmen of the Government that they are dealing with an enormous problem when they are dealing with that population. The total population of the three depressed areas in England is 3,410,000, whereas in Lancashire alone the population is over 5,000,000. There are black patches of depression in Lancashire which are almost as black as anything that you will find in Durham or in South Wales. I object to the assumption upon which the Government proceed that you must take a county as the area—that the artificial frontier of a county must settle the percentage of unemployment within that county. The mind of the Government works not on the number of persons suffering within an area, but upon the geographical frontiers that are laid down by surveyors and by custom and practice. The population of two towns alone in Lancashire—Manchester and Liverpool—is bigger than the whole of the county of Durham, and the population of the city of Salford is greater than the whole of Cumberland. The Government must really alter their outlook upon this problem of depressed areas.

Of all the industries that have suffered, cotton, I feel sure, has had the severest blow of all. There are three main industries in Lancashire—coal, cotton and engineering—and the position in all three is indeed becoming rather desperate. The number of workpeople employed in the cotton industry between 16 and 64 has dropped by 16.5 per cent. since 1923. I have heard Government spokesmen arguing that that is not as bad as the decline in the coal industry, in which the number of miners has been reduced in the same period by 18.7 per cent. That is true, but a decline of 16.5 per cent. in one industry in one county is far more serious than a decline of 18.7 per cent. over the whole coal industry of the country. There has been a steady decline in the number of insured persons employed in cotton for many

years past. I am not going to blame the Government entirely for this, but it is nevertheless true that the decline in the number of persons employed in cotton has been accelerated in the last two or three years. There has been a decline in the number of cotton operatives in Lancashire alone of nearly 100,000 in the last four years.

Major PROCTER: Will the hon. Gentleman give us the figures for the last three years?

Mr. DAVIES: I do not want the hon. and gallant Gentleman to mix up the number of persons employed in the cotton industry and the percentage of unemployment in that industry, because I want to analyse that point later on.

Mr. CROSSLEY: During the last three years production has actually risen slightly. As no new machinery of any sort has been put into the mills, how can it be true that unemployment has actually increased in the three years?

Mr. DAVIES: If the hon. Member had lived in Lancashire as long as I have, he would see the point at once. The practice of more looms to one weaver has been in operation for some time, and consequently a smaller number of weavers is required than used to be the case. The hon. Member will find the figures I am quoting in the Ministry of Labour report.

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the MINISTRY of LABOUR (Mr. R. S. Hudson): Is the hon. Gentleman talking about insured persons in employment, or the total number of persons?

Mr. DAVIES: I think it is the latter—the number of persons attached to the industry. There is a difference, of course, between the two, but the operation of the regulations under the Anomalies Act is being felt more severely in Lancashire than anywhere else because of the number of women in the industrial field, and many of those are not taken into account by the Minister of Labour in his figures. If the hon. Member thinks that I am exaggerating the conditions in the cotton industry, I will give him another figure that ought to convince him. You can get a very good picture of the trend of events in any industry by the number of students entering colleges to study the technical side of that industry. The principal of the Old-

ham Technical College issued a statement two days ago that the number of students entering had declined from 144 in 1926 to only six in 1934. The Government do not seem to take any heed at all of the deterioration in this first-class industry and, as far as I can see, it is likely to decline further still in its production and in the employment of its people.

I shall be asked by Members of the Tory party what is my remedy. The cotton industry itself ought to bring about some of its own remedies from within. I have no doubt about that. There are, I should imagine, on the employers' side some of the most difficult people to organise of all our manufacturers and producers of commodities. But it is grossly unfair that we should rest upon an occasional visit to Manchester by the President of the Board of Trade. The cotton industry ought to have as much attention from the Government as bacon and pigs, milk and cheese and tramp shipping, but it has not. The Government talk now about subsidising tramp shipping, but there will be nothing at all to carry from Liverpool and Manchester shortly. What is the use of talking about subsidising tramp shipping when you have nothing to carry in the ships that you are subsidising? That is what we are coming to.

We are told sometimes that the Government ought to take stronger action with regard to exports from Lancashire to the Dominions and Colonies. Let us see what happens outside the British Empire. I have the latest returns from the International Cotton Bulletin to show what is happening to cotton throughout the world. Not only are we losing ground to Japan in European markets, but the latest returns show that shipments of Japanese textile goods to Chile and Uruguay during the first five months of this year increased by 317 per cent. and 998 per cent. respectively over the corresponding period of 1933. We have been told, too, of the several agreements that have been made with foreign countries. I should like to ask what is going to be done to help this industry. Textiles in the past were the biggest single item in our export trade. Consequently, I have been astonished from time to time that the Government have not paid more attention to this problem. How comes it about that we have all

[Mr. Davies.]

these arrangements for milk, cheese, and potatoes, but the biggest industry exporting in the country—cotton—is allowed to go down and down and down? All that the right hon. Gentleman does is to pay a visit occasionally and have a lunch in Manchester about once every two years. I do not want to be offensive. One of the reasons why Lancashire is neglected and ignored is that although it comprises one-eighth of the population of this country, a population bigger than Scotland, it has one drawback that it has not one of its 60 Members in the Cabinet. And we call this a National Government. It seems to me, therefore, without being offensive, that it just depends who are in the Cabinet and what their interests are. When a Labour Government comes into power I am sure that Lancashire will not be left in the cold.

Mr. McKEAG: I believe that the complaint on the Tyneside is that the right hon. Member does not pay attention to its needs because if he did he would be afraid of showing partiality for his own district.

Mr. DAVIES: The hon. Member has the Prime Minister in Durham, for what he is worth. Lancashire is a problem to which the Government ought to direct its attention. There were exports of cotton goods to the value of £22,000,000 in 1923 and they had fallen to £11,000,000 in 1932. I mentioned that employers were not playing the game. What have they done? They have actually helped, inadvertently or otherwise, to destroy their own trade. They have dismantled mills and sold the machinery to Asiatics. They have helped them to make on the spot what Lancashire used to sell. They have sent out scores of their best operatives to teach Chinese and other Asiatics how to do the job they were doing at home.

Mr. J. JONES: Capitalism has no conscience.

Mr. DAVIES: It has not, and neither has it any foresight.

How does this problem work out in detail in Lancashire? I have some excuse for speaking because in one town in my division, Hindley, there is the highest percentage of unemployment in the country. I shall naturally take care when I

support a Government that my division will have the lowest percentage of unemployment in the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Tinker) referred to the figures last night for coal mining in Lancashire but they are worth repeating. The number of miners was 112,000 in 1923, and it is 65,000 to-day. In my own Parliamentary division the number of coal miners has been reduced in ten years from 10,000 to 1,700. I think, therefore, that those of us who represent constituencies like mine are entitled to call the attention of the Government to what is happening in this great county.

As I have been at some pains to find out about these pockets of unemployment, I would say that they are as depressed as some of the special areas, but merely because they are pockets in a large county area they are not singled out as such. For instance, Great Harwood, out of 22 weaving sheds, has six totally dismantled, six more sheds idle, and only 10 sheds and one mill at work. The population has declined by one-sixth. Take Preston, the county town of Lancashire. The unemployment benefit paid out in 1928 was £21,000, and in 1933 £354,000. I ought to say incidentally that this is the one town in Lancashire where I found infantile mortality slightly on the increase. I measure civilisation in the end by the infantile mortality rate. I have here the report of the county medical officer. Although this report shows that the people are not suffering in physique as one would imagine, still tendencies are shown that the people are not able to maintain their strength as some of us would like. Take the case of Oldham. The number of cases relieved in March, 1931, was 500 at a cost of £309 per week, while in November, 1934, the figure had grown to 2,348 persons at a cost of £1,444.

Mr. CROSSLEY: How many of those are not able-bodied?

Mr. DAVIES: I have the figures here and will let my hon. Friend have them if he likes. Then there is Wigan, the nearest town to my division. Here the figure of 3,100 relieved per week at a cost of £853 has risen in November, 1934, to 3,758 and a cost of £1,035. One hon. Member inferred in an interruption that things had been better since this Government came into being. What has hap-

pened in Lancashire is that since this Government came into being, as the figures of unemployment have gone down, so the figures of those on public assistance have more than gone up *pro rata*.

Sir ARTHUR STEEL-MAITLAND:

All those receiving public assistance are required to register, so that more names will appear on the register.

Major PROCTER: While a person counts one on the unemployment register, he may count for the rest of his family as six or seven for the purpose of relief.

Mr. DAVIES: That has always been an argument. I have never understood that they all registered, but some of them may. The argument that I am using now is exactly the same as that which the right hon. Member used when he was in power.

Sir A. STEEL-MAITLAND: I have never made that statement. I have always recognised the fact to an increasing degree, and now practically in entirety, that in the case of those receiving relief, the heads of families are required to register before relief is given. I have never refused to acknowledge that.

Mr. DAVIES: I am giving these figures by way of comparison. Whatever the right hon. Gentleman may say, they know that the number of persons on public relief have increased since this Government came into being. Then there is the feeding of school children, which is a good indication of the trend of events. The number of children fed in Manchester has risen from 3,000 in 1925 to 12,000 in 1934. The average weekly number of cases relieved by the Manchester Public Assistance Committee has increased from 9,405 in 1931 to 20,349 in 1934, and the weekly cost from £7,333 to £14,560, or roughly £750,000 per annum. I want to add that the local authorities are finding it very difficult to face this problem of increased rates, because the Tory Government relieved industrial concerns under the De-rating Act, throwing the rates on shops, warehouses and cottage property. You can walk through some Lancashire streets miles long now and find approximately one out of every three shops closed because of the heavy rates imposed by the authority to meet this extra expense. At Hindley 48.3 per cent. of the insured population are unemployed. In Westhoughton itself there are 34 per cent.

unemployed. When we talk of Cumberland, if arguments hold good, these percentages when they are not thrown into those for the whole county are greater than some of those in Cumberland. Why did they not throw Westmorland in with Cumberland? If they had done that and squared the percentages, they would have found little unemployment in Cumberland. The complaint I make is that the county frontier is an artificial one, and not the best way of arriving at a conclusion.

I am very glad the right hon. Gentleman the President of the Board of Trade has now come to listen to this Debate. He will know that Liverpool and Manchester have ports. What the right hon. Gentleman and the policy of the Government have done is to sacrifice shipping in favour of other industries being safeguarded. There is Liverpool. I will give some figures relating to the period during which this Government has been in power. On 5th April, 1930, there were 30,251 applicants for public assistance; on 6th October, 1934, the figure had grown to 83,208. In 1931, when this Government came into power, the cost of public assistance was £500,000 per annum; in 1934, it had risen to over £1,000,000. It is estimated for 1935 that the figure will be nearly £1,250,000. These figures support me in my statement that Lancashire has been neglected by this Government. I now turn to the Administrative county of Lancashire, and the same tale is unfolded there. On 15th November, 1930, 17,031 persons were relieved in one week at a cost of £4,499, and on 10th November of this year, the weekly figures had grown to 36,076 persons at a cost of £10,791. All along the line, wherever you turn in Lancashire, you find this paralysis creeping over the county, and the Government do not seem to take any notice at all of what is happening. South Wales is taken as a depressed area. It is true that Cardiff has not been scheduled in that area, but the number of persons drawing relief in Cardiff, according to the last figure, was 529 per 10,000. Gateshead on the Tyne, in the heart of one of the most depressed areas of all, was 815, but in Liverpool, which is not regarded within the depression at all, was 1,029, and I say therefore once again that the Government have overlooked the mighty problem of Lancashire.

[Mr. Davies.]

I now turn to a very pleasing feature. I have known Lancashire long enough to remember the half-time system in operation there, and the great struggle some of us had to abolish the terrible infliction upon children in sending them to work at the mill in the morning and to school in the afternoon, or *vice versa*. All that has been wiped off now, and there is the strange but pleasing feature about Lancashire that throughout the county you have more enthusiasm for raising the school-leaving age than is the case anywhere else. That is indeed very gratifying. The argument is sometimes employed that the raising of the school-leaving age will not affect employment and unemployment, and I cannot understand how hon. Gentlemen reach that attitude of mind. They say that if you raise the school-leaving age from 14 to 15, you will not affect unemployment at all. Let me reverse the order. What would happen if you reduced the school-leaving age from 14 to 13? I think that they would see that the raising of the school-leaving age must ultimately affect unemployment in this country. If the school-leaving age were raised, and it applied to Lancashire, it would affect about 50,000 children.

Once again I would ask the Government to bear in mind this very important county which is suffering so much in silence. There are in the House of Commons about 60 Members of Parliamentary Divisions in Lancashire, and only five of them have seats on these benches and I happen to be one of them. There are only five of us belonging to the official Opposition. If there were 55 Members from Lancashire of any party, on this side of the House instead of five, I am sure that the Government would have been already compelled to take more notice of this county than is the case. I should not be doing my duty on this special occasion of the Debate on the King's Speech if I did not try once again to put the great county of Lancashire, part of which I have the honour to represent, on the picture before the Government.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. CROSSLEY: I shall not take more than a few minutes of the time of the House. I have very considerable sympathy with the premises of the hon. Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies).

I think that Lancashire, in many parts, is a depressed area, and I agree with him that it is being left out in the cold when certain areas are arbitrarily chosen as depressed, and parts of Lancashire are not chosen as depressed. At the same time, I felt that throughout his speech his criticism—I will not call it unfair, because I have a very great respect for the hon. Member—of the Government, especially on the cotton trade was ill-considered. I do not intend to convey for one moment the impression that Lancashire is a prosperous place to-day, and that all is well in Oldham. It is not. It is far from it, especially because it depends on a trade which is intensely and acutely depressed, and the courage and bravery of its people are beyond admiration. In all these long years of depression the way they have kept up their spirits is more than wonderful.

At the same time, let me take the true facts of the cotton markets into full consideration. There are really two cotton problems—the problem of markets and that of the organisation of the trade itself. In one I am in total agreement with the Board of Trade, and in the other I am not in total agreement with them. Take the problem of markets and look at it impartially. What have the Government done? Take the home market. They have shut out four-fifths of the foreign imports to begin with, and incidentally Japan is not the largest importer to-day. In addition to that, the capacity for the home market to consume has increased by something like 300,000,000 square yards a year—a very remarkable achievement under one Government, when you consider that the total home market of the cotton trade before the present Government came into power was about 500,000,000 square yards.

Let us come to the Dominions. We could only bargain with them. We did bargain with them, and the success of those bargains in relation to the cotton trade is very great. We have more than doubled our trade with South Africa, and we have more than doubled it with Canada. With regard to Australia, it is slightly lower than it was last year, but it is very definitely higher than it was before the Ottawa Agreements. You cannot say to Australia, "You shall not take any Japanese cloth," because Japan takes a great deal of Australian wool. It must be arranged by bargaining. In the

Colonies we have imposed quotas. Perhaps some people do not like their being imposed. I am glad that they have been. I think the Government were right to delay fixing them, because I genuinely think that there was a real chance of securing a general world agreement concerning markets with Japan before they were imposed.

Then there is the question of Trade Agreements with foreign countries, a subject which the hon. Member just touched upon, and where, I think, his remarks were most ill-considered. These Trade Agreements have been very remarkable in their effects upon the cotton trade. The Scandinavian Agreement mainly concerned coal, because Scandinavia is a large importer of coal, and only a comparatively small importer of textiles. Nevertheless textiles to Denmark have gone up more than one-third since that Agreement—40 per cent. actually. In addition to that, take the Argentine. Here was a big Trade Agreement which largely concerned cotton goods. Our cotton exports to the Argentine over the last period of 12 months, which was up to the end of August, actually increased by more than 50,000,000 square yards of cloth. This is a most remarkable result when you consider that the total imports for the last year before the Trade Treaty amounted to just over 80,000,000 square yards of cloth. I hope that the hon. Member will reconsider that sort of criticism, because in some ways he has a case for saying that Lancashire has been left out in the cold in this problem of the distressed area; but when he puts forward arguments like that he not only overstates his case but he prevents any possibility of this House really making a sincere and concerted attempt for the betterment of the whole district. It brings Lancashire down into the realms of party politics, and it is a great pity to do so.

In touching upon the other side of the cotton trade, I feel that the Government have been guilty in not taking far more active steps to help the reorganisation of that trade. I do not believe for a moment that the trade schemes submitted by the trade unions last year would have worked very well. I think it was a sincere attempt to inquire into a great many of the problems of the trade. But there have been two other schemes. In neither Sir Thomas Barlow's scheme of

1931 nor up-to-date in the present scheme before the industry have the Government ever openly said that they hoped that they would be accepted. What they said in the case of the scheme of 1931 was that if the trade, with a sufficiently large majority, voted in favour of that scheme, they would pass the necessary legislation.

What the industry really wants, and what would really help it to make up its mind on this occasion—and it has to make up its mind almost at once—is a real open, frank statement from the Government that, if the industry were to take the step of reducing their spindles, the Government will come in and help them with the necessary legislation, and, if necessary, give them a small guarantee of a loan to tide over the difficult times. Lancashire has the right to ask for that, if only because in the past the county probably supplied more money to the British Exchequer than any other county in England. It wants a lead from the Board of Trade in exactly the same way as the country in its foreign policy wants a lead from the Foreign Minister. We want the right hon. Gentleman to state his views on this subject. We have never heard them. If he would give his views on the question of the cotton trade reorganisation, the first step—the reorganisation of the spinning section—might well be taken in the very near future. Once that step is taken, reorganisation must go through the other processes. It could not stop there.

I doubt whether anybody who has been in constant contact with the war of attrition going on between mill and mill throughout all those years, the partly called-up share money and the loan money, and all its dependent heritage of bankruptcy, its slow lingering bankruptcy, could want anything else but an almost immediate reorganisation of the trade. It is only if we get that sort of reorganisation of the trade that we shall be able to get sufficient money for the trade and be able to renew our machinery, only about 30 per cent. of which has been installed in Lancashire since 1910. I do not want to enter upon any controversial ground at this stage of my speech, but I believe that if our machinery were really renewed, we should have a much better chance of competing with foreign countries in the cotton markets of the world. At the

[Mr. Crossley.]

present time, not only is the industry disorganised throughout its sections and between its sections, but the machinery is often antiquated.

7.29 p.m.

Mr. HAMMERSLEY: No Member of a Lancashire constituency will have any complaint against the hon. Gentleman the Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies) in raising the question of the cotton trade. I, for one, shall do nothing to minimise the very serious state of the county of Lancashire, but it appeared to me that a great deal of his speech was occupied by points of criticism, and that there was very little in it of constructive proposals. What I have to say will be said in no spirit of carping criticism against the Government. Those of us who are engaged in this very difficult and complex industry recognise the limitations within which Government action is possible. It is, as the hon. Member for Oldham (Mr. Crossley) said, a trade which still, in spite of a continuous number of years of depression, has over two-thirds of its productive capacity expended in sending goods overseas, but the growth of economic nationalism in countries throughout the world has made a situation in which it is almost impossible, whatever we do, to get cotton goods over tariff barriers which have been raised to unscalable heights.

Despite the fact that the field of action is limited, the authority of the British Government and the purchasing power of the British market could do a great deal to help the Lancashire cotton trade. So much I believe the Government have recognised. Through their action, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Oldham, and the action of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in introducing a system of quotas, the Lancashire cotton trade has definitely been very greatly helped. It is help which will be cumulative. Certainly, the figures are beginning to show themselves now, and those in Lancashire who appreciate the difficulties of the situation are grateful to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Government for the action they took in that respect. In regard to the Trade Agreements, good and valuable work has been done by the Government, work which has resulted in an increase in ex-

ports to many of those markets and countries where Trade Agreements have been made, but those markets are comparatively small compared with the real problem of Lancashire.

The most important market for Lancashire is the Indian market and unless that can be effectively dealt with the outlook for the Lancashire cotton trade will be very serious and gloomy. It is in respect of what the Government can do in the Indian market that they have laid themselves open to some legitimate criticism. May I remind the House that the duties against the importation of United Kingdom cotton goods into India is at the present time at the figure of 25 per cent. That figure consists of 15 per cent. protective duty and two surcharges of 5 per cent. Those two surcharges were imposed for revenue purposes, and they make a total tariff barrier of 25 per cent. I think it is common knowledge, certainly it is common knowledge within the trade, that this 25 per cent. duty imposed by India against Lancashire cotton goods is at an unreasonably high level, a level which is not required by the Indian mill owners, a level which is causing hardship to Indian agricultural interests, and a level which is doing a great deal of harm to our trade.

Because of that unreasonably high level of duties the expectations aroused in Lancashire by the abrogation of the Indo-Japanese Agreement and the subsequent imposition of restrictions of the importation into India of Japanese cotton cloth, have not been realised. We expected that we should get a better volume of trade in India. What has happened? In spite of the fact that the importation of Japanese cotton goods has gone down very considerably, the quantity of cotton goods consumed in India has decreased. The consumption per head in India of cotton goods in 1932-33 was 16.34 yards, but the figure fell in 1933-34 to 13.72 yards. Therefore, it appears that India could without any disadvantage to its own trade and with definite advantage to its own agricultural population allow the importation of larger quantities of Lancashire cotton goods, and so help in the general economic welfare.

It has been felt in Lancashire for some time that the high rate of duty of 25 per cent. against Lancashire cotton goods

creates an impossible situation, and it has been realised that probably the most weighty factor in inducing the Government of India to maintain that rate of duty has been the authority of the Indian mill owners in the Legislative Assembly. It was because of their apprehension of that situation and because the people of Lancashire desired to put into some effective form the words used by the Lord President of the Council when he mentioned "Imperial rationalisation," that Lancashire decided to endeavour to pursue a policy which would enable the Indian mill owners and those concerned in the cotton trade in India to get what they would consider a fair deal and which would enable the people of Lancashire to consider that they had got a fair deal. For that purpose, at their own expense, the Lancashire cotton trade sent a mission to India and that mission came back with certain achievements. Those achievements were of a character which ought to enable the Indian cotton trade to go ahead and prosper and at the same time to enable the Lancashire cotton trade to have some reasonable hope for the future.

We got an agreement from the Bombay mill owners. They stated specifically that if the Government of India found it possible to remove the 5 per cent. surcharge, they would not object to its removal. The mission brought back an undertaking from the Government of India that they would negotiate a trade agreement in which the preferential position of this country in relation to the Indian market would be specifically and absolutely laid down and in which the right of entry of Lancashire cotton goods into the Indian cotton market under fair and reasonable conditions would be ensured, and, further, that all those uncertainties which had arisen in respect of Ottawa would be cleared up. In return for what appeared to me to be most important attainments, the Lancashire mission, as representing the Lancashire cotton trade, said that they would endeavour to infuse an atmosphere into Lancashire of sympathetic appreciation of Indian political aspirations, that they would endeavour to see that Lancashire used a greater quantity of Indian cotton, and that in respect of any Colonial quota regulations which might be imposed in the future the exports from India should have a fair chance with the exports from Great Britain into the Colonial market.

Of these undertakings which Lancashire gave to India every one has been implemented. Evidence of our good faith, our good will and our anxiety to work side by side with our confreres in India is real and unmitigable. At the present time they are in receipt of substantial and valuable benefits, but those benefits which we expected to receive are still in the air, and it is no wonder that there is a great deal of anxiety in Lancashire. Let us assume that some foreign country in which we had a large and valuable market said to our Government: "We propose to negotiate a trade agreement with you." Is it possible that this House would agree that we should be content to remain idle for over 12 months while our trade which was going to be affected by that trade agreement, instead of advancing, was declining month by month? The situation is this, that the treaty is still being negotiated and we are still waiting for it; nothing has been done, and nothing has come to the light of day which would enable Lancashire to go forward with greater confidence. We are entitled to ask why it is that because Lancashire's greatest market is a British dependency the situation should turn out more unfortunate for the very depressed cotton trade than it would have turned out if its greatest market had been a foreign country.

There is no secret in the fact that the Lancashire cotton trade were very apprehensive least this delay should take place. They counselled a different kind of negotiation than negotiation by protracted correspondence. They urged that an authoritative and responsible official of the Government—the Government have many such officials at their command—should be sent to India to negotiate such an agreement on the spot, and I would ask the Government at this late hour whether it would not be advisable even now—India is not so very far removed in time from us as she used to be—to send out a responsible official and get this trade agreement on to the Table of the House of Commons. Lancashire is entitled to see the terms of the trade agreement laid on the Table of the House of Commons before coming to any final decision with respect to the new Constitution for India. We are going to have a policy of good will—and I believe that it is the only practical policy—and a policy of mutual accommodation

[Mr. Hammersley.] with India. If such a policy is to be a practical reality and not a succession of misleading platitudes, there must be evidence of that good will from both sides. The situation, as I see it, is that the Government at the present time can force the Government of India either to produce the trade agreement or they can show to the world that the basis on which we are trying to work is unreal and unsubstantial.

There are, as the hon. Member for Oldham said, other ways in which the Lancashire cotton trade and the County of Lancashire can be helped. The fundamental thing to-day in respect of the question of reorganisation is to deal with redundancy. It has become quite clear that not within our day and generation will the productive capacity of Lancashire be absorbed again. The recent census shows that something like 13,500,000 spindles were redundant. Until the productive power of the country is brought into a closer relationship to present day demands the situation of internal competition will be such that it will be almost impossible to create an effective basis on which the trade can be reorganised. A solution of redundancy is the key to reorganisation.

As Lancashire Members know, there are two schemes before the cotton spinners of Lancashire. One is a proposal to set up a new association and the other a proposal to deal with redundant mills. In my view it is a little unfortunate that these two proposals are linked together. The most important is the scheme to deal with redundancy. If the redundancy proposals can find a satisfactory solution, then it may be desirable to have a new association armed with these plenary powers, but if you do not deal with redundant spindles it will be unfortunate to have these plenary powers with ability on the part of some committee to impose a system of quotas and pooling for the whole industry. The view I take is that Lancashire has to reach forward to a higher plane of efficiency, and that she cannot get over her troubles by endeavouring to spread the burden over redundant mills. Get rid of redundant mills and then reorganisation will take place.

It is, of course, a commonplace criticism of the Lancashire cotton trade to say that they will not speak with one

mind, that the industry cannot get together. On the question of redundancy, I believe that they are much nearer together than they have been at any time in their history. I want to reinforce the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham in his suggestion that the Board of Trade might help in this direction by making a statement. For instance, only 75 per cent. of the trade have replied to the inquiries in connection with redundancy. Surely the Government are entitled to request the trade to express its opinion on these matters, and it is rather a reflection on a great industry that 25 per cent. of effective spindles have not made their wishes and desires known in respect of this all-important scheme for dealing with surplus mills.

One appreciates the remarks one hears in Lancashire that the Government have done a great deal for practically every industry, that their tariff policy has increased the purchasing power of the home market, and that as a consequence of this increased purchasing power practically all industries have reaped a material benefit. Agriculture, it is said, is a subject of the greatest concern to the Government, but the cotton trade appears to have been left out in the cold in many respects. I do not think such criticism is justified, and I have tried to say that in my opinion the Government have done a great deal. But there is still much more to be done. I come back to the point from which I started. Increased trade with India will give increased prosperity to Lancashire, and this increased trade can be built up on an effective trading agreement negotiated freely and willingly between the two countries. It is the duty of the Government to treat this as a matter of urgency and to put it on the table of the House at the earliest possible moment.

7.50 p.m.

Mr. REMER: No one is more delighted than I that the question of the cotton industry has been raised in this Debate, and in the cotton industry I include all other textile industries. Although the constituency I represent is largely associated with silk, yet there is a large cotton industry and more than one-third of my constituents rely on the cotton trade and its subsidiary industries. I must thank the hon. Member for West-houghton (Mr. Rhys Davies) for raising this issue to-night. At the same time it

seems to be a strange conversion on the part of the hon. Member and his friends, who have taken very little interest in the cotton industry until my friends and I pointed to the considerable alarm which exists in the county of Lancashire and in the county of Cheshire that so little attention was being paid to this great industry. I notice that the President of the Board of Trade has just left the House. Perhaps he regards me as an unmitigated nuisance and does not want to hear what I have to say. On page 209 of the important document which has been handed to us to-night I find that there are wide recommendations dealing with shipping but not one single word which gives any kind of safeguard to the cotton industry.

The silk industry, the artificial silk industry and the cotton industry, present the same problem. In silk it is a question of Japanese competition in the home market. In artificial silk and cotton it is Japanese competition in the Colonial and Dominion markets, and in India. As regards the Colonial market, the Government have dealt with it by means of quotas. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton (Mr. Hammersley) did great service in connection with the mission to India, and, although I have had no consultation with him since he arrived back, I understand that the Government have done nothing whatever to implement the trade agreement which they were able to secure in India. I think that he and his colleagues have great cause for complaint as to the way they have been treated. They gave their time in going to India, and little has been done to follow up what they were able to secure. I suggest that on one of the days which we have been promised shall be secured to private Members, indeed on several days, the problems of the cotton industry, and, indeed, of the textile industry as a whole, should be considered. It ought not to be on an odd day in the week, or on the Adjournment at 11 o'clock, which is all that we have ever been able to secure on previous occasions through the courtesy of Mr. Speaker. We do not want to make ourselves a nuisance to you, Mr. Speaker, or to Ministers of the Crown, by having to keep the House late at night. I hope that by arrangements made through the usual channels we shall have opportunities whereby the greatest exporting industry of this country shall be

able to state its case and grievances to the House.

There are 80 Members in the House representing the County of Lancashire, and about 20 Members representing the County of Cheshire. All the great textile industries are suffering from unemployment, and they all should have adequate opportunities of expressing their views on the Floor of the House. The hon. Member for Oldham (Mr. Crossley) spoke as though all they had to do was to get new machinery, modernise their works, and then all in the garden would be lovely. Where is the capital coming from to re-equip the works? There are mills in almost every part of Lancashire which are 30 years old, but which are still making profits, still working full time, and overtime. The obvious fact is that wages in Japan, even allowing for all their schemes of benefits for their workers, are not more than 20 per cent. of the wages which are paid to workers in Lancashire, Cheshire, and Yorkshire. I am not one of these who are prepared to ask the workers in my constituency to work under anything like the conditions which are laid down by the trade unions of Japan. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Westhoughton is prepared to ask the workers in Westhoughton to do so, but I am not; and I think the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Tinker) would be one of the first to say that he would not allow one of his constituents to work under such deplorable conditions.

Mr. TINKER: Hear, hear!

Mr. REMER: What do we find? I make the same complaint against the last Government as I do against the present Government, that nothing whatever is done to alleviate the deplorable situation in which the cotton trade finds itself. Any Government, the present or any future Government, will have to face up to this Asiatic competition, and unless it is dealt with promptly by means of quotas, or something else, this country will eventually find its textile factories just museums for people to look at as evidence of what was once the great cotton industry. Unless the Government act quickly the British textile industry is gone, and gone for ever.

8.0 p.m.

Lieut.-Colonel Sir WALTER SMILES: In rising to speak on the problem of

[Sir W. Smiles.]

Lancashire I find that most of the points I had intended to make have already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies) and others; but of course that is an experience which is very common to back bench Members who speak late in any Debate. I remember that on the occasion of a former Gracious Speech the hon. Member for Ladywood (Mr. Lloyd) said that this was to be known as a Government of action. Although I congratulate the Government most heartily on their achievement during the past three years, I sometimes think that they are faltering on their last lap. They are like a runner who, having covered three-quarters of the distance, needs a very big heart to carry him forward, even when ahead of the field. Probably we all have constituents who come to us and suggest various schemes for the improvement of the people. Often they are very expensive schemes. My first question to them always is: "Are the people themselves ready to pay for the schemes?" If I think that the people are Income Tax payers I ask: "Are you prepared to have one shilling put on your Income Tax to pay for this scheme of yours?" If I suspect that they are beer drinkers I ask them: "Would you stand another penny a pint on beer?"; and if they are cigarette smokers I ask them if they would like another penny on their packet of cigarettes.

But there is one thing that, without exception, I find people are ready to pay for, and that is anything that will help the unemployed of this country. In this matter one cannot help feeling that Lancashire has been left out in the cold. The Government have appointed two people to look after the depressed areas, and Lancashire has been left out. The hon. Member for Westhoughton has mentioned a lot of the figures. In some towns 60 mills out of 120 have been closed down, some of them for ever, and in other towns nearly one-fifth of the population is unemployed. Of course the record of the National Government is that since they took office they have put 850,000 people back into employment, almost as many as the last Administration put out of employment, and I have no doubt that by the time the present Government have finished they will have put back in work over one million people.

Unfortunately, however, most of the people they have put back into employment have been people in the Birmingham area and the Midlands and around the South Coast, and not in Lancashire.

The time is ripe now for an extension of unemployment insurance. We know that the Government are considering its extension to agricultural labourers, but what should be taken in hand also is the extension of unemployment insurance to domestic servants. It may be said that that is a small thing, but I see from the returns that 1,300,000 females and 78,000 males are employed in indoor domestic service. It is agreed that there is very little unemployment in domestic service just now, but that is the best reason why the matter should be taken in hand without delay. We remember the statement that this is a Government of action. It is easy, of course, for a private person to build a house or pull down slums quickly, but when it comes to Government action the delays are always great. It is much easier for a private individual to put up a large hotel beside the Marble Arch than for a municipal authority to pull down a few slums in the centre of London; there are so many Government inquiries to be put in hand and forms to fill up. For that reason I urge the Government to make appropriate inquiries immediately into this question of unemployment insurance for domestic servants.

It is not always that even a Government can prophesy aright. I think it was Lord Ponsonby who only about a month before the War broke out said, "Things in Europe have never been quieter, and I see no reason for war breaking out at present." Although there is no unemployment among domestic servants at the moment, it is quite possible that conditions may materially alter within the next two or three years. I remember that the Minister of Labour in the last Government got into serious trouble for trying to establish centres for the training of domestic servants. I consider none the less that these people should be helped in every way possible. It is no harm for anyone, woman or man, to know how to cook. Probably there is hardly a Member of this House who despises a good dinner. I do not include the hon. Member for Bridgeton (Mr. Maxton), because he is an ascetic and might despise

such a thing; but very few other Members would.

I remember a speech by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Greenwood), in which he said that the nation was in danger of becoming a C3 nation. He mentioned the children's teeth and their eyes, and already in this Debate the hon. Member for West-houghton has mentioned the condition of the children as one of the most important things for a country. For that reason I think it would be a good thing for every woman to know how to cook, and also to have time in which to do her cooking. I remember the copy book maxim, "The pen is mightier than the sword," but nowadays there is a great absence of good cooking, and many people think that the tin opener is becoming mightier than the frying pan. We should appreciate the fact that cooking is skilled labour and the management of a household is skilled management. The skilled housewife knows how to feed her husband and children at probably half the cost that would be expended by an untrained housekeeper, and would probably do it better too. I do not think that even the schools of dietetics that have been established realise what effect diet has upon the character of the people. We find that the people from Scotland, where the national diet is supposed to be porridge and whisky, are always very great travellers, and very often travellers to the south. In Ireland on a diet of potatoes feelings are aroused that are almost always against the Government.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Hammersley) spoke of the trade agreement with India, and spoke as if every province in India was engaged in cotton manufacture. But there are provinces where the people have to buy their cotton goods and do not manufacture them. After all, the principal centres in India are Bombay and Ahmedabad, and with few exceptions the cotton industry of India is concentrated in those places. Therefore when this excessive tariff is put on, although it may do good to the workers in those two places, it makes everyone else in the rest of India pay considerably more for clothes. Out of 360,000,000 people far less than 20,000,000 or so are directly employed in the mills.

Another thing that might bring some of our unemployed back to work in Lancashire would be the bringing of

some of our industries up from the south. It has been the custom lately for industries to migrate south, but in a lot of ways that puts us in a very dangerous position. We have the question now of the Arsenal at Woolwich. Woolwich is only a short distance away from the Continent, and surely it would be extremely dangerous for us to have the whole of our armament factories or a large part of them concentrated in that town. It might be possible to establish some of the big arsenals further north, or in depressed areas like Tyneside, South Wales and Lancashire. It is impossible for us to shut our eyes and behave like ostriches when we know that one nation expects very soon to have an army of 5,500,000, and that another nation is training children under 10 years of age to be soldiers. I believe in insurance for myself and my family, and I look upon a strong Army, Navy and Air Force as merely insurance for this country. Surely if it is right for us to insure our families it should be right for us also to insure our country?

8.12 p.m.

Vice-Admiral CAMPBELL: We have had so many discussions and so much has been said about the cotton industry, that I hope we are getting to the stage when we can get down to deeds and leave aside some of the words. I have not raised my voice in this House before on the subject of the cotton industry, though I represent one of the most distressed towns in Lancashire. The reason is that I have had and still have the most implicit faith in the Government, and especially in the President of the Board of Trade, who I know has devoted much of his time to this very important industry. At the same time there is such a thing as a limit to one's patience, and I think that at this time it is very unfortunate that when the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his speech on the depressed areas he made no reference to Lancashire. In the Most Gracious Speech from the Throne, again, there is no reference to the cotton industry. I cannot help feeling that those two omissions will have a bad effect in Lancashire, and that the people there, who have been unemployed for so long, will begin to lose heart and hope and to imagine that the Government have no sympathy left for them.

Another reason why I have refrained from discussing the subject before is that

[Vice-Admiral Campbell.]
I realise some of the many difficulties that lie before the President of the Board of Trade. I do not think that if he looked all round the cotton industry for one man to whom he could put the question, "What do you want?", that that man could give him an answer; and if my right hon. Friend sent for half-a-dozen men and asked them to say what the industry needed, they would not all give him the same answer, or anything like it. In addition one has to remember that in other industries such as the shipping industry and the herring industry, the same sort of thing applies. The Government have been able to help those industries; I hope they will yet be able to help the cotton industry. I also realise that in the negotiations which my right hon. Friend has been carrying on in the East, he has not had that argument which this country had available for so many years, namely, the argument of the British Navy. He has had to negotiate without that very useful argument. Perhaps it is for good that that argument is no longer there to be used, but the fact has to be faced and we have to waste many months shaking hands and saying sweet nothings to each other before we can get on with the business.

It may also be said that the cotton industry must reorganise. Some people think that the employers are to blame for the bad condition of the industry: others say that it is the employes through their trade unionism who have held up the improvement which might otherwise have been attained in the industry. However that may be, the fact remains that in Lancashire to-day there are thousands of men and women, boys and girls, who are out of employment through no fault of their own. I do not expect the Government to do marvels all of a sudden and I do not want them to make promises which they cannot fulfil. That would be worse than anything. But I would like the President of the Board of Trade to give some definite indication to Lancashire of what the Government consider to be the prospects of the cotton industry. I would like him to say definitely whether the Government consider that the condition of the industry is due to bad organisation on the part of the industry itself, and whether, if the industry gets busy reorganising itself, the Government are prepared to

help and in what way, whether financially or otherwise.

I would also ask my right hon. Friend to say whether the Government consider it to be the case that the cotton industry can never recover the prosperity which it once enjoyed, and that those who are looking for employment in the industry to-day must now begin to look elsewhere. These are questions which ought to be answered in fairness to the people of Lancashire. Those people have borne their burdens with great fortitude, and I am second to none in my admiration of them. They have shown faith in this Government and in themselves and a hope that everything would come right in the end. I believe that if they get a good lead from the Government, if they get a plain statement of what the Government can do and what they cannot do, and what they consider the future prospects to be, such a lead and such a statement would inspire courage—though Lancashire has always had courage—and would help to restore a faith which is at the present time wavering a little for the want of some definite pronouncement of that kind.

8.19 p.m.

Mr. FLEMING: I take my stand on this matter as a Lancashire man born and bred. I do not pretend to know as much about the cotton industry as the senior Member for Stockport (Mr. Hammersley), but all my life I have had dealings with men and women engaged in that industry. I have also been in the cotton mills when work was brisk, and I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that nowhere will you find more contented people than Lancashire weavers when they are busy. It is often said that Lancashire folk are born grumblers. I think it is said also of the people who hail from Scotland. Be that as it may, it seems to me that if you want to get anything done in this world, and particularly in this House, you have to be a persistent grumbler even if you are not a born grumbler.

Ever since I came into this House I have taken particular notice of the President of the Board of Trade. I have never spoken to the right hon. Gentleman but I have heard him speak several times, and I have heard him reply to criticisms on what he has been doing or rather not doing for Lancashire trade.

I have noticed one persistent note running through all his speeches on those occasions. His advice to Members for Lancashire constituencies, whenever he has been tackled with regard to the textile industry of that county, has always been: "Have patience." For three years we have done as the right hon. Gentleman desired. We have been patient, but our patience is almost exhausted, our hope is nearly dead, and our charity for the right hon. Gentleman is beginning to turn to something very uncharitable. When I go to my constituency in Manchester where there is not a loom working, where there is not a spindle to be found, but where most of the men who have helped to build up the Lancashire cotton industry live—those who are working in that industry to-day—I find that those men when they speak of the President of the Board of Trade seem to agree upon one thing, namely, that the right hon. Gentleman ought to give some lead as to what the policy of the Government is within regard to re-organising the textile industry of the County Palatine.

The majority of people in Lancashire will most carefully read the Gracious Speech from the Throne if they have not done so already, and they will see in it a reference to the re-organisation of the herring industry and a suggestion that the re-organisation of that industry is closely engaging the attention of His Majesty's Ministers. We in Lancashire are glad to see that something is to be done for that industry. We are glad indeed that the Government by their tariff policy have done so much for other industries. I also agree with the hon. Member for Oldham (Mr. Crossley) that the Government's policy has done a little for the Lancashire textile industry. It has increased sales by a few million yards to the Argentine and by a few million yards to Denmark. But every one of us in this House, no matter to what school of politics he subscribes, will agree that the textile industry in Lancashire is in a parlous state. I do not want to go into acrimonious arguments as to who is to blame. I agree with my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Burnley (Vice-Admiral Campbell) that among one section the employers are blamed while among another section the trade unions are blamed. What I want to know from the President of the Board of Trade is,

what are the Government going to do to assist in the re-organisation of the industry?

Let us suppose as has been suggested that the masters are incapable of re-organising the industry. Let us suppose alternatively that the fault lies at the door of the trade unions. I subscribe to neither doctrine, but let us suppose either or both of those things to be true. Is it to be said that this National Government are going to leave this great trade to suffer between masters and men. If what is said about the masters or about the men is not true, are the Government then going to stand aside and allow negotiations to drag on as they have been doing to my knowledge for the last two years? Am I still to return, time and time again, to Manchester and to give the same reply when the question is put to me, not because I have any direct interest in, or expert knowledge of, the textile trade, because I have none. The most that I know is a little shuttle-kissing, because when I was quite young I went to the mills and watched these things done. As representing a Manchester constituency, as being a Manchester man, as being a Lancashire-born man, I have to try to explain to those people what the National Government propose to do to assist in the reorganisation of this great industry, and up to now all that I can say to them is, in the words of the President of the Board of Trade, "Have patience, have patience." I am afraid that I cannot go again to my constituency and tell those men and women, whose lives have been bound up in that industry, that again the President of the Board of Trade can only tell us to have patience. I sincerely hope that this evening we shall hear something definite from the right hon. Gentleman as regards this serious question of the reorganisation of the Lancashire cotton industry.

8.28 p.m.

Major PROCTER: I listened with some surprise to the hon. Member for West-houghton (Mr. Rhys Davies), who opened the Debate this evening. I have such a great admiration for his personal qualities that it made me quite sad when I heard him, as I thought for propaganda purposes in Lancashire, make three false statements, or, I should rather say, misrepresent the conditions in Lancashire. He said how much worse conditions were

[Major Procter.]

during the last four years. Surely it was most unfair to say how much worse things were during the last four years without at the same time saying how much better things have been during the last three years. The second mis-statement was when he pointed out the increased figures of Poor Law relief. He must know that the improvement in Lancashire is there and is very much the fruits of Government action, and he must know that when a person goes on relief he is not necessarily knocked off the register. His name still continues there, but while for unemployment purposes he counts as one on the register, if he has a family when he goes on to Poor Law relief he may be counted as six or seven. The third misrepresentation was that while he blamed the Government for inactivity, he did not point out that even in the hard-hit cotton trade unemployment had decreased during the time of this Government by nearly one-half. If that had been the achievement of the Labour Government, it would have been shouted from the housetops.

Therefore, it seemed to me to be most unfair, especially when I remember that the Labour party in Lancashire stand in a very peculiar position. They stand as representatives of the workers, and yet any examination of the problem of cotton in Lancashire must reveal the fact that the loss of our export trade is entirely due to Japanese competition. We cannot do anything to help that. It is not a case of reorganisation so much as it is the loss of our markets, and we have lost our markets because we cannot produce our cotton goods at the same price as the Japanese, because the Japanese are paying their operatives 6s. 10d. a week. I, as a supporter of this Government, in spite of what a Labour Government might do or say, am not agreeable to our operatives working at a lower standard of pay. It comes very badly from hon. Members opposite. When the leaders of their own unions, the 32 trade unions in the cotton trade, were invited to consult with all of us Lancashire Members concerning the parlous condition of the workers, the Lancashire Labour Members refused to turn up to that conference because there was no official invitation and because the invitation came from a private Member. Surely we should not stand on ceremony—

Mr. PARKINSON: I do not want that statement to go forth, because half the Labour Members were not invited to the meeting of which the hon. Member is speaking, yet afterwards, when we held the meeting, we had the same people as they had, and they took upon themselves the responsibility for the two meetings that took place.

Major PROCTER: I sent out the invitations to every Lancashire Labour Member, every Lancashire Liberal Member, and every Lancashire Conservative Member. All the Lancashire Members received an invitation from me, but the dignity of the Labour Members would not allow them to attend simply because I invited them—

Mr. PARKINSON: But the Lancashire cotton people took upon themselves the responsibility for the joint meeting not being a success.

Major PROCTER: I was requested to convene this meeting and—

Mr. AUSTIN HOPKINSON: By whom?

Major PROCTER: By Mr. Speke, of the cotton operatives of Lancashire.

Sir JOHN HASLAM: He is secretary of the weavers.

Major PROCTER: I was asked to do it, and I did it, because I believe in things being done and not simply talked about.

Mr. HOPKINSON: Did the hon. Member expect us to turn up on that occasion?

Major PROCTER: Yes, if you were interested in the cotton trade. I desire to make three affirmations. The first is that the cotton trade is better in Lancashire now than it was three years ago. That is due, I am glad to say, to the attitude which was advocated by Members on this side, that some action should be taken in our Colonial Empire against Japanese competition. I thank the Government for closing that market against the Japanese. It had a good result this year in producing an extra 200,000,000 yards of cotton cloth, which will mean an increase of 10,000 workers in the cotton trade in Lancashire. I am glad that they have carried out the legalisation of agreements, which un-

doubtedly safeguards the standards of life of the cotton operatives. I rejoice that unemployment has gone down in Lancashire—in my own constituency from nearly 18,000 to just under 8,000—and it has been due to the fact that, in spite of the terrible conditions of competition that we have had to meet from Japan, the Government have at least given to the people of Lancashire that confidence which they had lost from 1929 to 1931.

As one who wishes the Government could have travelled at an even faster pace, I wish to record my appreciation of these things. I realise the Government's great difficulty because the Lancashire cotton trade speaks with 100 voices. Nevertheless I want to set before the Government constructively one or two small things which I think will help. Take the case of mill rating. A case occurred only a few weeks ago at Accrington of a mill that provided the livelihood of some 300 people. It could not meet foreign competition, and it became silent and empty. A group of local patriots headed by our Development Association tried to save the mill, but the owner could not afford to keep on paying the rates. According to the present law, you cannot keep a mill so that it can give employment in the future for you have to take the machinery out if you want to cease paying rates. The result is that the machinery is either sold abroad or broken up for scrap, and there is no chance of the mill starting again. I ask the President of the Board of Trade to consider the efforts which we are making to get mills started again and to speak to his colleagues in the Cabinet in order to see if something can be done so that idle cotton mills are not rated. Will the right hon. Gentleman also endeavour to draw up a programme so that we can get finance? In the case of one mill in Accrington, if it could only have got £7,000 it could have started and given employment to 300 or 400 people, but because it had not the necessary finance it could not carry on and the people are now on the dole. We cannot get money from the banks, which have a stranglehold on the mills of Lancashire.

I ask the President of the Board of Trade not to allow foreign firms trying to establish factories in England to be guided by the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of London to the green fields round London. I hope that his

Department will take hold of this matter and compel such firms to go where the empty factories are and where the derelict people and mills remain. Will he give a clear-cut promise that if the Lancashire cotton trade put forward a scheme agreed by the operatives and manufacturers, it will have Government support, and, if necessary, financial assistance so that it can be carried through in the same way as the right hon. Gentleman has carried through the schemes for shipping and other trades which have been badly hit.

8.38 p.m.

Mr. J. JONES: It is remarkable to discover how quickly people can change their economic outlook as they change their constituencies. The hon. and gallant Member for Accrington (Major Procter) was a candidate in our district not long ago. He was then an advocate of all the good things that were to come from tariffs, and he then held that if only we had tariff reform in all its glory everything in the garden would be lovely. This evening he has addressed the House on the parlous condition of the Lancashire cotton industry.

Major PROCTER: We want more tariffs.

Mr. JONES: What kind of tariff would the hon. and gallant Member suggest for meeting Japanese competition?

Major PROCTER: In the British Empire, 1,000 per cent. if necessary.

Mr. JONES: That means prohibition?

Major PROCTER: Absolute prohibition.

Mr. JONES: Then we should have a fuss in the Pacific and economic warfare would give rise to the other kind of warfare. Yet some hon. Members opposite say they believe in the League of Nations. I stand for the policy of the party to which I belong. Our economic policy is international co-operation and the organisation of production and distribution, not for the purpose of profit for a few, but for the purpose of use for the many. I assure the hon. and gallant Member for Accrington that we have great sympathy with Lancashire, but where does the trouble begin? It begins at the very basis of the system in which he believes. No tariff which you could erect would prevent your

[Mr. Jones.]

losing markets in the Far East where people can live on a handful of rice and a bit of fish. Our standard of living in this country is higher, and we cannot get down to their standard. The hon. and gallant Member represents a constituency which has been very busy at times. I worked there once as a labourer for 18s. a week for an engineering factory producing machinery to be sent to China, India and Japan. They sent out skilled mechanics to put the machinery into the factories. The inevitable result was that the cotton operatives of Lancashire were thrown out of employment, for skilled mechanics in Lancashire were sent over to train the coolies in India, China and Japan to take their jobs away from them and to take the bread out of their mouths.

That is the economic effect of the capitalist system. It is not a new philosophy, but an old experience. Some hon. Members talk about the Government subsidising industries. If they do that can we prevent other governments subsidising their industries in order to meet our competition? What tariff can we erect that will prevent other countries from erecting a higher tariff? The truth is that we have reached the end of the system in which hon. Members opposite believe and they will not admit it. Capitalism is dying from its own inanition. "Each man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost" no longer applies. The big fish eat little fish and the little fish eat mud. England as the home of the capitalist system has reached the end of the tether. I started in Lancashire on the Socialist platform as a boy and we were howled down for our pains. We had bottles thrown at us, but they were not full. They were empty, like the heads of the people who threw them. We have got to the stage now when Lancashire, which used to be the pride of British industry, is appealing to the Government and saying, "For God's sake, what are you going to do for us?" This great industry, built up by the ingenuity of those who in the early days invented machinery which made it possible to become great, and built up by the industry of the workers who worked the machinery, is in a hopeless position. The hon. and gallant Member says that there has been a slight improvement in employment. Weigh up the

employment and the number of people who have been thrown on to Poor Law assistance with the situation as it used to be, say, 10 years ago, and I venture to suggest that the hon. and gallant Member will have no right to congratulate himself.

I have heard speeches about industries coming to the South. What kind of industries have come to the South? I represent a Southern constituency. I won my spurs in the Labour movement in the North of England, but I came to the South, and I have lived here and brought up a family here. Where is this great improvement to be found in the South? I would ask some of my hon. Friends to come with me to the docks to-morrow morning to watch the muster for employment and to see only one man in five taken on. Yet they talk about prosperity. Let them come to the Albert, the Victoria, or the King George Dock, or even to the London Docks, which are closer to Tower Bridge, and see the men mustering-up there and then going away hopeless, because all they have left to do is to go to the Employment Exchange and sign on for a day's pay. To talk about prosperity is to insult the intelligence of the people. When people say that Lancashire or any other part of the country is prosperous or not prosperous I reply that the whole country is not prosperous.

We are living upon our past, and trying to look forward to the future, and asking this National Government to give us a national outlook. Most of its members are not here to give us anything at all. They are helpless and hopeless; they are up against the bankruptcy of their own system. There are a few Socialists among them to make up the weight, but they very seldom turn up on the Front Bench. We want to know what the Government are going to do about the present situation. It is no good making speeches about what we might do if we had the chance. The Government have got the chance. They have the biggest majority a Government ever had since 1832, but what are they doing with it? All their own supporters are finding fault with them. The hon. Member for Accrington asked to be told immediately what the Government were going to do for Lancashire. As I have said, he was a candidate in my district only a few years ago, but now he has

gone to Lancashire, and is still asking the Government, "What are you going to do about it?" They have done all that he asked them to do when he was in my part of the world. Tariff Reform was all he wanted then, and he now has a full jorum of it. We are one of the highest tariff countries in the world. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh, yes. We start putting on tariffs and other countries retaliate, and it is a case of diamond cut diamond. They can play the game in their own particular way. [HON. MEMBERS: "So can we."] Yes, and we are going to play the game to the end. We on these benches are fighting against the system you others defend. We shall carry on that fight because we know that none of your schemes will solve the problem which is facing us, and that is the production of wealth for the benefit of the people.

To-day wealth cannot be produced, as it used to be, for the private profit of a few sections of the community while leaving the great mass of the people derelict. To-day we are producing wealth in greater measure than ever, and yet we are crying out about unemployment and want. The whole situation is becoming impossible and the Government do not propose any remedy. Our remedy is the old one—Socialism. It is the only one that matters. It is the organisation of society in the best interests of all its members; not the production of wealth for the advantage of individuals, but the production of wealth for the advantage of the whole community; not the control of men in the interest of things, but the control of things in the interests of men. No matter what politicians or statesmen may say, we in this country have reached the end of the capitalist system and will have to find a better one. Even the United States of America, a great capitalist country, have found that they have to make a modulated system, something different from that which they have had; and we in this country will have to find a method, and that method can only be found when Governments realise that the world is, after all, a small place. The production and distribution of wealth are becoming a matter of geographical distance. We can bridge the oceans, master the air and almost destroy space, and we have a right to ask, "What use

are you making of all this power?" At present we are doing nothing.

All this talk about depressed areas leaves me cold. Why should there be any depressed areas? Is it not most extraordinary that the depressed areas in this country are the wealthiest areas naturally? South Wales depressed! It is the richest coalfield in Great Britain, if not in the world, for its size. Lancashire depressed! It is the greatest textile area in the world. The North-East Coast is depressed. Why? Is it because the people have lost their cunning and are no longer able to carry on production? None of these depressed areas is really depressed from the economic standpoint. Hon. Members point to the South of England. From the standpoint of some people, the South of England is mainly a pleasure garden, but there are parts of it which are not so pleasant. My constituency is not a very pleasant place to represent. The dock district is not so very pleasant. But there are parts of the South of England which are pleasant places in which to spend a holiday—and, of course, there are others in the North. I have spent some time in Blackpool. I worked as an assistant "boots" at one of the hotels in Blackpool. Yes, and I know Southport. I was an assistant "boots" in Southport. I am not hiding my light under a bushel, but hiding my boots under the seat.

I speak only as a rough and tumble sort of chap, but I want to say that so far I have heard nothing in this Debate which puts the position as it really is. Our industries are not failing because they cannot produce the things required. They are failing because the world has become a workshop. Every other country is beginning to produce the things which it requires, and is building barriers against every other country and we are coming to the position, as it were, of living by taking in one another's washing. That is the consequence of the production and reproduction that goes on in the capitalist system of society. This King's Speech is a very nice speech, but I should not like to make the King responsible for it. I do not believe he would accept it himself, if I were to ask him. But there is nothing in it except the fact that the Government are at the end of their tether and do not know where they are or where they are going.

8.54 p.m.

THE PRESIDENT of the BOARD of TRADE (Mr. Runciman): The course which the Debate has taken since it was resumed this afternoon has led us into Lancashire, and the Lancashire Members have quite rightly done their best to state the condition of their major industry and to beg that some assistance may be given to it. I hope the House believes that there is something beyond the mere activity described by my hon. Friend the Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies), who, earlier in the day, stated that my sole interest in cotton was that I had gone up to Manchester for a cotton lunch. My interest in cotton has been unceasing ever since I took office. I have had some very difficult situations to deal with and it has not always been possible for me to come down to the House and to describe exactly what was going on behind closed doors. Those who are directly responsible for the organisation and management of the cotton industry and whose colleagues and clients are employed in the Lancashire cotton operations were not prepared to have the whole of their transactions discussed on the Floor of the House, so we have been in the unfortunate position of having to hear a great deal of criticism without being able to reply.

May I draw attention to one aspect of the cotton industry which deserves consideration in this House? There is no doubt that we are paying the penalty in Lancashire, as in some other parts of the country, of the rampant, mad, financial boom that came after the War. The harvest in the North has been well described by one of our most excellent writers, and there is nothing that he said that is an exaggeration of what we all know to have taken place in some of the best and most prosperous of our Lancashire towns just after the War. That was the beginning of the trouble, and some parts of Lancashire have not yet shaken themselves free from that embarrassment. Simultaneously with that there has been a considerable expansion of competition in the cotton industry throughout the world, and I believe that those who are better able to judge are right in saying that the surplusage of spindles and of looms in this country is one of the outstanding features of the troubles which surround

the industry. An effort was made by one scheme after another to bring together the separate units of the Lancashire cotton industry, but so far those schemes have not on the whole been successful.

The question of redundant capacity in the mills has, throughout all these troublous times, been foremost in the minds of the gentlemen who guide and guard Lancashire's principal industry. Since 1930 that problem has been more acute, and I would like to give a few facts as landmarks in the recent history of the cotton industry for the guidance of the House. In March, 1932, I undertook, in addressing the cotton industry, when they visited me in London, that if the Joint Committee of Cotton Trade Organisations decided to prepare a suitable detailed scheme for concentrating production through a levy for the purchase of redundant machinery, and were able to secure for it a measure of support of a kind that would commend it to Parliament, I would be prepared to recommend the Government to authorise me to promote the legislation needed to give authority for the collection of the levy. I regret to say that the scheme, which was circulated to the spinning section in May, 1932, and provided for the appointment of commissioners by the Board of Trade for a limited period with power to raise loans and acquire or otherwise arrange for the immobilisation of machinery, the loans to be secured by a levy at a rate not exceeding 3d. per spindle, was not supported by the industry.

If the House will permit me to say so, I do not think that I was responsible for the industry declining to undertake it. That was their doing. The question however is now being further considered, following the report of a sub-committee of the State of Trade Committee of the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners. This sub-committee has been inquiring into the problems of the spinning industry, and it has reported that the success of the proposals which it put forward for the restoration of the stability in the spinning section—here come the conditions—depended upon a scheme being formulated and adopted as quickly as possible for dealing with excess of productive capacity. So we come back to the old problem. Further, they said that an essential portion of such a scheme

would be the provision of a fund for the purchase of surplus plant. It is quite obvious that unless there was a fund of this nature there must be a considerable number of owners of mills who would not be prepared to fall in with the scheme. They could not afford to do so, because they would have landed themselves into hopeless financial embarrassment if they had gone into it without a fund somewhere behind them. It was recommended that a drafting committee should be set up, and I think that it was at this stage that the committee secured the services of Lord Colwyn as chairman of that committee. They were very fortunate in that choice. It was further stated that in the event of a scheme of that sort securing the support of a sufficient proportion of the trade, the scheme should be forwarded to the Board of Trade with a request that the Government should give facilities for the legislation necessary to put the scheme into operation.

It became necessary that we should secure not only the concurrence but the co-operation of the industry as a whole. The scheme could not be imposed from outside. A committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Colwyn, was convened accordingly in July of this year. In its report, the committee envisaged the elimination of some 10,000,000 spindles at an estimated cost of £2,500,000, of which sum it was hoped that £500,000 would be recoverable as scrap value. It is estimated that interest on the remaining £2,000,000 and sinking fund to cover writing off over a period of, I think, 15 years would amount to some £180,000 per annum, and it was proposed that this sum should be met by a levy on the remaining 30,000,000 spindles. Ten million spindles were to be wiped out and 30,000,000 were to be continued. I understand that discussion is still proceeding in Lancashire on another recommendation of the committee. The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Hammersley), I think, said that he was not quite sure whether he would support it or any of the recommendations of the committee. The essential elements of the scheme are threefold: That there should be a reduction of surplus spindleage; that there should be a fund out of which compensation could be made to those who make a sacrifice for the good of the whole, and that

the scheme itself should meet with the support of the industry as a whole.

Mr. GROSSLEY: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the authors of the scheme and those who are responsible for it are going round Lancashire to-day telling everybody there that the two schemes stand or fall together?

Mr. RUNCIMAN: I am not prepared to accept their view, but, if it be necessary that the schemes should stand together, the point certainly deserves reconsideration on the part of my hon. Friend and others who hold the same view as he does. The three points I have mentioned are essential and should be part and parcel of a reorganisation of the industry. Where we have played a part has been in trying to get a united vote. It is regrettable, when a scheme of this kind comes up for decision that there should be, as there has been more than once, more than 95 per cent. of those in the industry who do not vote at all. It is not my fault that they will not look after their own interest. I have given them an undertaking that, so far as the Government can recommend Parliament to take their advice, they will do what they can to amplify these schemes and to see that they receive the necessary amount of legislative support. I am told that about 95 per cent. of the owners of the spindles which are now under discussion may be regarded as being in favour of the scheme. I hope that, if they are, they will let us have some evidence of it. Obviously, it would be impossible for us to take action unless there was a decisive majority in favour of the scheme, and I hope the industry will, at the earliest possible moment, assure us of that fact.

Mr. HOPKINSON: Are we to understand from the right hon. Gentleman that, if these gentlemen in Lancashire put forward a scheme, the Government will, without examining that scheme and finding out whether it would be in the national interest or not, pledge themselves to carry out the scheme of that particular section?

Mr. RUNCIMAN: My hon. Friend need not be under any misapprehension. We are not likely to undertake to support a scheme which we do not understand and have not examined. But, having looked into the question, we have come to the

[Mr. Runciman.]

conclusion that there is more to be said for the elimination of redundant spindles than there is to be said against it, and that certainly we ought to do the best we can to bring about a stabilisation of the market. I am advised by those who know most about the cotton industry, and I have formed my own opinion also as an outsider, that the only way in which that can be done will be by removing from the market that great surplusage of spindles which has such a bad effect on the demand for yarn or other commodities.

Mr. HOPKINSON: Unfortunately, the right hon. Gentleman has been misinformed as to what the redundancy is. Ten million spindles only represent a comparatively small amount of the redundancy. The actual redundancy is perfectly well known to the heads of the cotton industry to be vastly in excess of 10,000,000, and a scheme based upon a figure of 10,000,000 is a hopeless scheme so far as the industry is concerned.

Mr. RUNCIMAN: My hon. Friend takes a much more gloomy view of the matter than I do. I have no doubt that the elimination of 10,000,000 spindles will have a considerable effect upon the industry as a whole. If, however, my hon. Friend has any quarrel with the scheme, let him go to its authors, let him take it down to Lancashire, and let the scheme which comes to London be one which represents the matured view of those in Lancashire who are in the closest touch with the industry.

Mr. CROSSLEY: If it be true that only about 75 per cent. of those responsible have voted, why should not the Government take as a basis the percentage of those who actually voted, and not the percentage of those who were eligible to vote?

Mr. RUNCIMAN: There may be something to be said for the suggestion of my hon. Friend, and I will keep it in mind. I would like to point out that when in October of this year a joint committee of the Federation of the Master Cotton Spinners' Associations approved the two distinct proposals, the particular sections of the spinning trade had entered or were entering into voluntary agreements binding themselves under penalties to observe certain conditions of

sale, and particularly minimum prices. I know that some of my friends in this House regard any arrangement of that kind as being contrary to the sound doctrine in which they have been brought up; but unfortunately nowadays you must proceed along those lines if you are to save the industry from indiscriminate and destructive competition. This agreement, which I believe was what is called a gentleman's agreement, has broken down. It is a great pity that a gentleman's agreement should have broken down; it would have been much better that they should have gone on with the agreement and carried it through to the end.

I do not want to go into other topics at any length to-night, but I should like to refer to two important aspects of the cotton trade which have not come under review, except, I think, in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham (Mr. Crossley). The first is the effect that the trade agreements have had upon the cotton industry. I have before me now a table showing what has actually happened with regard both to cotton yarns and cotton piece goods exported from Lancashire. In the four years 1931, 1932, 1933, and 1934 up to date, in the case of the Ottawa Dominions the effect of the Ottawa Agreements on cotton yarns is seen. They have gone up from 5.6 to 11.7 million pounds weight—that is to say, about doubled. I venture to suggest that that is one of the grounds on which we can commend the Ottawa Agreements to the country. In the case of the trade agreement countries—that is to say, the 13 countries not within the British Empire with whom we have made agreements—the export from the United Kingdom of yarns has risen from 9.3 to 20.5, and I suggest to the House that no better commendation of the trade agreements can be found than that very remarkable rise. At the same time, in cotton piece goods, the rise has been, in the case of the Ottawa Dominions, from 214 million square yards to 371 million square yards; while in the case of the trade agreement countries the rise has been from 171 million square yards to 247 million square yards.

One may describe the cotton industry in the most lurid language in the world; we may have very moving panegyrics on the industry and bravery of those who are engaged in the cotton trade; but

nothing can be more eloquent than these simple figures. They show that both the Ottawa Agreements and the trade agreements have done a considerable amount to open out markets in districts which were able to take our goods, at the very time when we were losing some of our trade elsewhere. It was the very thing that was necessary that we should, within the ambit of our own trade influence, be able to increase the demand for the cotton goods of Lancashire.

The other thing that I desire to point out to the House as having a very direct effect upon the cotton industry of Lancashire is the Indian demand. More than one speaker has referred to the position in India without, I think, realising, if I may say so, that the position out there is very different from what it was even 10 years ago. The trade mission, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport was a member, did very useful work. They made an agreement with their "opposite numbers" out there which has been of benefit, and will continue to be of benefit, to the Lancashire cotton industry. One thing that they were not able to do—indeed, it was not expected that they would be—was to make an agreement with the Government of India itself regarding importation into India and the tariff arrangements which would be made for the benefit of British goods. They had to come back without that agreement having been accomplished, but ever since their return we have been in communication with the Government of India.

I admit that a considerable time has passed since those communications were first opened, but I doubt whether anybody could have speeded them up, when one remembers the pre-occupations of the various gentlemen who compose the Government of India on the spot, and the difficulty which they have in dealing with all the problems by which they are at present surrounded with due rapidity. I hope that no one imagines that we have been leaving the Government of India merely to cogitate about these matters during the last 12 months. Far from it. We have been in regular communication, not only with the India Office here, but with the Government of India itself at Delhi, and I hope that in the very near future I shall be able to communicate to the cotton industry the result of our negotiations with India.

Everyone who has had any experience of dealing with these matters knows how extraordinarily difficult it is to reach an agreement which is likely to be of any striking benefit to us. All that we want is fair competition, and I hope that before the Tariff Board we shall be able to get the kind of hearing to which we are accustomed in a court of justice, and that it will be possible for the English case to be put, to be heard, and to be adjudicated by those who will take an impartial view, and not a too strictly narrow and provincial view. If the Tariff Board is prepared to hear arguments, I have no doubt that the case will be strong enough to entitle them not only to Preference, which is the policy of the Agreement which the Government of India made in Ottawa but to its extension to cotton, which certainly might and ought to be a characteristic of their fiscal policy in the future.

I have purposely packed what I had to say into very short compass for the convenience of those who want to come to other topics, but I beg the House not to take too gloomy a view of the cotton industry of Lancashire. It is true that there are very dark patches, some in the constituency of the hon. Gentleman opposite, but I am sure he would not attempt to make the House believe that that is characteristic of all Lancashire. It is not. I am glad to say that there are more people at work in Lancashire than there were four years ago. I am all for telling the truth about the distressed areas, but I beg that there shall be no exaggeration. At one time I had the honour of representing Oldham, and it was one of the most enterprising towns in the world, but it was a one industry town and now, when misfortune has fallen on the cotton industry, Oldham suffers. There are other towns in somewhat the same plight, but, taken as a whole, it is very remarkable that the cotton trade has made such a wonderful fight against the competition of the world, and I hope, if at any time it requires the assistance of this House, that help will be forthcoming.

9.17 p.m.

Mr. GEORGE HALL: The right hon. Gentleman rightly said that the Debate in the earlier part of the day was confined to Lancashire. It is left to me to bring it back to the country generally

[Mr. Hall.]

and to South Wales in particular. I am not going to follow the right hon. Gentleman in the statement that he has just made except to say that it is interesting to hear him, as a responsible Minister of the Government, making the statement that the condition of the cotton industry in Lancashire is very largely the result of a financial ramp which took place some time ago. If that be the case, I and my friends on this side of the House wonder at the timidity of the Government in dealing with the condition of that industry such as it has been described, not only by my hon. Friend the Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies) but by back bench supporters of the Government who have referred in very depressing terms to the conditions in the industry.

Here is the President of the Board of Trade indicating to the House, to Lancashire and to the country, that, notwithstanding the fact that the condition of that industry is almost entirely the result of its mishandling by those who are controlling it. [*Interruption.*] The right hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that the condition of the industry is such that a financial ramp is responsible, and it is only those people who own the industry who could indulge in a financial ramp. If that be the reason why the industry is in the condition that it is—[An Hon. Member: "It is not!"]—I leave it to the hon. Member to have that out with the President of the Board of Trade. That is the statement that has been made. If every Minister were as honest as the President of the Board of Trade, the same thing could be said of many other industries, and for that reason I wonder at the timidity of the Government in not taking the matter into their own hands, but in leaving it to those who have brought the industry into that condition and allowing it to get even worse. [*Interruption.*] That, again, I leave for the hon. Member and the President of the Board of Trade to deal with. I am simply dealing with the statement that has been made. If that be so, I am prepared to leave it to those who support the Government to deal with their own Minister who is responsible. If the hon. Member would only take his memory back, the financial ramp was largely from 1921 to about 1927-8, when the party of

which he is a Member was the Government of the country.

I have no desire to follow this matter any further. The Gracious Speech from the Throne marks the passing of the fourth Session of this Parliament, and I agree with the hon. Member for Silvertown (Mr. J. Jones), who agreed with hon. Members who said that in their opinion this is the last lap of the Government. I doubt very much whether it will be the Government of the country to introduce another King's Speech, at least I think that is the wish of a very large majority of the electors. My hon. Friend referred to the fact that here we have the strongest Government for over 100 years—strong in numbers only. Not only have they a majority in this House, but also in another place. They have all the industrial and financial interests of the country behind them and 90 per cent. of the Press of the country, and in their fourth Session they are bound to admit that all is not well, notwithstanding the political power that they have had during the last few years.

The legislation indicated in the Gracious Speech is very largely legislation dealing with India and domestic policy and the Government does not yet seem to realise that there are 2,250,000 people still unemployed. As the hon. Member for Silvertown rightly said, not only have we this very large number of persons unemployed, but the amount spent upon public assistance relief is increasing to a large extent. The actual figures for the financial year ended 31st March, 1933, indicated that £2,000,000 more was spent upon public assistance relief that year than in 1931-32, and the latest figures given in the "Gazette" for November indicate that there was in October this year an increase of 10 per cent. as compared with October last year in the number of persons in receipt of public assistance relief. In addition to the amount paid in unemployment benefit, both standard and transitional benefit, the public assistance relief at present amounts to £40,000,000. There is an indication that this is a strong Government. Again I say, strong in numbers only. No reference has been made in the Gracious Speech to the great mass of unemployed who exist in the country.

The question of distressed areas has been referred to, and legislation is expected to deal with some of the difficulties

that arise in those areas. Let me say that the proposals which were outlined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week are disappointing and do not touch the root of the problem with which these districts are confronted. There is in the Gracious Speech a reference to the maintenance of world peace. I want to say that it is very little use the Prime Minister, other Members of the Government, and some back benchers complaining about the agitation in the public mind concerning peace at the present time. The citizens of this country are rightly apprehensive, and at no time during the post-war period has there been so much concern shown by the people in the handling of foreign policy as in the way the Government have dealt with disarmament and with the League of Nations.

The country read with some concern the statement of the Prime Minister yesterday referring to the possibility of an increase in naval armaments. The Prime Minister in 1926-1927 complained very bitterly about 70 cruisers being the irreducible minimum required by the Government. He has now given an indication that we can expect a large increase in the Navy Estimates next year. I have no doubt that the country will go back to the position held by the Conservative Government in 1926. It was very interesting to hear the Prime Minister attempting to justify his attitude by referring to the escalator clause of the London Agreement. If he were here, I would ask him if there was any reason whatsoever for the escalator clause in the London Agreement to be put into operation. The London Agreement has been carried out by its signators, Japan and America, the two principal naval Powers besides ourselves having in no way violated a single portion of it. There is no justification for the escalator clause being put into operation. The people of the country are rightly concerned about the attitude of the Government on peace. It appears that we are to have a new race of naval armaments in the Pacific and air armaments in Europe.

Reference has been made to the difficulties with which the shipping industry of this country is confronted. It appears that a subsidy is to be given. Almost every industry is now on the dole. We have introduced an important change in our fiscal system, very largely at the request of the industrialists of this

country. We have applied protection; we have used quotas; we have collected debts; the State has acted in every way upon every desire which has been expressed by the industrialists of the country. The Prime Minister, in endeavouring perhaps to justify legislation for the shipping industry, referred to the fact that British shipping is suffering from cash subsidies granted to foreign shipping, and he said that that was not fair to British shipping. The Prime Minister should know, and the ship-owners too, that the shipping industry is in its present position because of the loss of trade, and this interference between the trade of one country with another.

I am hoping that I shall be able to indicate that shipping is suffering by reason of loss of trade in the coal industry, which alone is the cause of a considerable amount of shipping being laid up. No other industry can have a better case than the coal industry in this respect. The coal exporters of this country are confronted with the difficulty that very heavy subsidies are being given to coal exported from Poland and Germany. Germany a month ago was subsidising export coal to the extent of 7s. a ton. As a result of that heavy subsidy, they were able to eat into markets which formerly took British coal. I do not want in any way to induce coal exporters to come cap in hand, as almost every industry has done, to the Government and say, "Please Sir, we are faced with competition very largely as a result of the policy of this Government. Now please give us a subsidy to help us over this difficulty."

Much has been said about other industries, but I cannot occupy time dealing with them, for I want to speak of the coal industry. The policy of the Government has still left a large percentage of unemployed in some of the industries which it is presumed to have benefited enormously by its tariff policy. One would imagine that the protective duty of 33½ per cent. would have solved all the difficulties of the iron and steel industry, but there is still 20 per cent. of the iron and steel employes unemployed. There is still 25 per cent. of the persons in the tin-plate industry unemployed. When it comes to some of the other industries, particularly coal, then the percentage of persons unemployed is higher

[Mr. Hall.]

than ever before. So bad are the conditions in the districts in which lie the heavy industries, which should be the most prosperous, that commissioners have been sent to them, to South Wales, the North East Coast, Durham and Scotland.

The reports of these commissioners are very illuminating. The commissioner for South Wales in his report states definitely that South Wales has been penalised indirectly by the trade agreements of the Government. I will go further and say that there has been such a great interference in the trade of South Wales by trade agreements, that, instead of benefiting, South Wales has directly lost a very large portion of its market. The attitude of this Government to the coal export trade of this country has been callous and indifferent. I am not suggesting that the North-East Coast has not benefited to some extent. I am not criticising their slight advantage. But who is there that will say this wholeheartedly of the North-East Coast and the Durham and Northumberland coal-fields? I have gone into the figures dealing with coal exports before the interferences with the fiscal system of this country took place under the present Government. I find that for the 10 months ending October, 1930, we exported 46,500,000 tons, and for the first 10 months of this year 33,250,000 tons, a reduction of no less than 13,250,000 tons. I have taken these figures from the Board of Trade returns to-day. It is not generally realised that the four great coal importing countries are our four near European neighbours. France for the first 10 months of the year 1930 took about 11,000,000 tons of coal from us, and for the first 10 months of this year she took 6,400,000 tons. Therefore, there is a loss in the export market of this country of no less than 4,500,000 tons. In the same proportions the same sort of thing can be said of Italy, Germany, Belgium, and the Irish Free State.

Mr. HUDSON: Will the hon. Gentleman give the figures for the intermediate years between those dates?

Mr. HALL: Yes, I have them all here. If the hon. Gentleman agrees, I will read them out to him, or I will hand my statement to him so that he can study them at his leisure. [An Hon. Member: "Read them out."] For the first 10

months of the year 1930 we exported to France 10,900,000 tons.

Mr. HUDSON: The total exports?

Mr. HALL: In 1930, 46,500,000 tons; 1931, 35,500,000 tons; 1932, 32,500,000 tons or thereabouts; 1933, 32,500,000 tons or thereabouts; and 1934, 33,250,000 tons or thereabouts.

Mr. HOPKINSON: The tide has turned.

Mr. HALL: I do not know what point the hon. Member desires to make about those figures.

Mr. HOPKINSON: The point the hon. Gentleman has made is that the figures show that as a result of the Labour Government of 1929 onwards we lost our coal export trade.

Mr. HALL: I have taken the first 10 months of 1930. In 1930 when we had a Labour Government the export of coal for the first 10 months from this country was 46,500,000 tons, and in the first 10 months of 1932, during the time of the National Government, the coal exports from this country amounted to 32,500,000 tons, or a reduction of 14,000,000 tons.

Mr. HUDSON: Will the hon. Gentleman give the figures for 1928 and 1929?

Mr. HALL: I have not those figures, but if they were given I think the hon. Gentleman would find that the 1929 figures were slightly higher than the figures for 1930.

Mr. HUDSON: I think the hon. Gentleman would find that what happened was that, after the comparatively high level when we were last in office, the slump took place during the whole period of the Labour Government. We have now checked that slump. The figures have increased during the time of the present Government.

Mr. HALL: I do not want to make a party point of this matter, but desire to point out the effects of the trade agreements and the change in the fiscal system upon some parts of the most important industrial areas of this country.

Sir A. STEEL-MAITLAND: May I ask the hon. Gentleman the course of the export coal trade in this country and the course of the export coal trade in other countries which export coal on any sub-

stantial scales. Can he give us those figures? They would prove whether we have not done well, or whether we have done well. It is a comparison with the coal trade of the world which is essential, and not merely the years.

Mr. HALL: I will respond to the invitation of the right hon. Gentleman. Italy was essentially the market of this country, and South Wales benefited more as a result of the export of coal to Italy than any other part of the country. The German exports into Italy for the first eight months of this year went up by 1,650,000 tons. During the same period the British exports were down by 280,000 tons. This brings me to the next point. Notwithstanding the fact that the Government have made an agreement with France, let it be understood that the agreement simply gives us less than 50 per cent. of the average export of coal from this country for the years 1928, 1929 and 1930, and even now there is difficulty in getting the French nation to carry out that part of the agreement. Almost every other coal importing country has increased its exports of coal into France beyond the quota allowed, whereas in the last month or two we find that the quantity of coal imported from this country is down by 85,000 tons below the quota provided for in the agreement. I would ask the hon. Gentlemen on the Front Bench opposite to convey to the Government our opinion concerning not only the question of the falling off of export trade, with its terrible effects upon the people who reside in those districts, but also the failure of the French and the German nation to carry out the agreements solemnly entered into by the British Government and the Governments of those countries. During the last two months the falling off in the coal trade between this country and Germany is such that the trade agreement has been of very little use whatever, and it is time the Government took note of the failure of those schemes.

I will deal directly with the position in South Wales. Again I am taking 1930, and comparing it with 1934, during which time there has been a reduction in the number of persons employed in the coal industry of South Wales of no fewer than 130,000. There has been a falling off in output and in shipments. From South Wales for the first 10 months of this year there will be a falling off in the shipment

of coal, as compared with 1930, of 8,000,000 tons. Those 8,000,000 tons would give employment to 32,000 miners, in addition to a number of men who would be indirectly employed. South Wales at the present time can rightly be described as a depressed area. I doubt very much whether persons living in London and the southern counties realise the difficulties with which the distressed areas are confronted. Taking the country as a whole one out of every five insured persons is unemployed, but in Glamorgan we have 38 per cent. of our men unemployed, and in the eastern district of Glamorgan, the area covered by the commissioner, 45 per cent. of the men are unemployed. In my constituency I have a community of 10,000 people where scarcely 200 or 300 men are employed. At one colliery we have 1,250 men working their notices, and the possibilities are that they will cease work at the end of this week. Instead of conditions improving in some parts of the South Wales coalfield they are growing very much worse.

It may be argued that the Government are not altogether responsible for the decline in our export trade. I should be glad if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, in the absence of a Cabinet Minister, would convey to the Minister of the appropriate Department the information that there is not only a falling off in the amount of coal sent for shipment but a falling off in the amount of coal used for inland purposes. The Minister of Transport is partly responsible for the conditions that exist in certain parts of the South Wales coalfield. That condition has arisen because of the difficulty that has been created in connection with the coal consumed by steam vehicles. These vehicles are perhaps not very popular in the opinion of a large number of Members of this House, especially those who drive motor cars, but from the point of view of employment they are most valuable vehicles. In September, 1931, at the time of the conference on road and rail transport, the Salter Commission, there were in force 6,507 licences for goods vehicles on the roads propelled by steam, and also licences for 618 steam tractors. It is estimated that each of these vehicles used on an average 100 tons of coal or coke per annum. The consumption of coal by those road vehicles at that date

[Mr. Hall.]

appears to have been approximately 650,000 tons per annum.

The latest figures which we can obtain from the Ministry of Transport indicate that there has been a decline of steam-driven goods vehicles to 2,775, and it is understood that in the very near future the number will be down to less than 2,500. There is a large market for coal used by the vehicles, but that market has been lost. The coal used by these steam vehicles came almost entirely from South Wales and, strange as it may appear, it came from the district which I have the honour to represent in this House. There is one colliery there which has lost a market of 50,000 tons of coal as a result of the regulations which have been imposed by the Minister of Transport. Another colliery in the top portion of my Division, which had not lost a single day's work until nearly 12 months ago, has lost trade so severely that if they work three days a week now they are very fortunate. Almost the whole of the output of that colliery went for the purpose of supplying the kind of coal suitable for these steam vehicles.

To make a comparison. The value of this market is almost equal to the value of the coal market of Finland, which was regarded as being sufficiently important for a special trade agreement. Much has been said about the scheme for hydrogenating coal, and the new process which is being set up in Durham. The market for coal which has been lost as a result of the regulations imposed on the steam vehicles means that we have lost a market almost equivalent to the market to be created by the new hydrogenating plant when it is established in Durham. I thought that the difficulty in regard to these steam vehicles was largely one of taxation, that the taxation made it almost impossible for them to run, but I understand that it is not a question of taxation but a question of the regulation which has been imposed by the Minister of Transport. The Minister of Transport, without coming to this House for legislation, could so alter the regulations governing the weight of these vehicles that it would be possible not only to stop the decline in their number but to enable us to reach a number equivalent to the number in use in 1931. In the interest of the coal industry generally and in the in-

terest of the industry responsible for the manufacture of these vehicles something ought to be done whereby the Minister of Transport would seriously consider the question of revising the regulations. Now that the Lord President of the Council is with us I would ask him to represent to the Minister of Transport the desire of the interests affected as a result of these regulations to meet him and to put to him a well reasoned case concerning this very important matter.

I had intended to deal with the difficulties of the distressed areas, particularly as they affect South Wales, but I understand that legislation will be introduced next week dealing with this matter, and I propose to leave it until that legislation has been introduced. I would say, in conclusion, and I say it with no hostility to the Government, that we would hold up our hands for any improvement in the distressed areas, particularly South Wales. South Wales is essentially a coal producing area. Fifty per cent. or thereabouts of the insured workers in South Wales are dependent upon the coal industry. May I say in regard to the Commissioner who visited South Wales that I do not think the Government could have appointed a better individual to have undertaken the investigation? He won the confidence of the people almost as soon as he met them. Although he has left South Wales there is a great feeling of friendliness towards him. We thank Sir Wyndham Portal for his visit, but we wish his suggestions had been very much bolder. We doubt, however, whether the legislation proposed to be introduced by the Government will even carry out the suggestions contained in Sir Wyndham Portal's report. I put it to the Lord President of the Council as representing the Government that he, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister should make an investigation of the distressed areas. If they did so I am convinced that very much bolder schemes would be inaugurated to deal with the difficulties with which these areas are confronted.

In South Wales—I am dealing with the area covered by the Commissioner—45 per cent. of the men are unemployed, and 75 per cent. of these men have been unemployed for more than 12 months. There is a feeling of hopelessness in the minds of these men which it is impossible

to describe, and I would appeal to the Government not to consider this question by the amount of money it is going to cost in re-conditioning these districts and these men. The men who reside in this area have been responsible for making this country the great industrial nation it is to-day. They are deserving of something better than that suggested in the Report of the Commissioner; they are deserving of something better than that which is contained in Part II of the Unemployment Act. They are deserving of work, and, failing work, of adequate maintenance to keep themselves and their families in that degree of comfort to which they are entitled.

9.57 p.m.

Sir ADRIAN BAILLIE: Unlike most hon. Members who have addressed the House I do not propose to deal particularly with the interests of my constituents, although I happen to represent a distressed area. In the first instance, I should like to support the plea which has been made by the hon. Member for Aberdare (Mr. G. Hall) in regard to an alteration in the regulations governing the use of steam wagons. I have taken an interest in this matter for some time, and on the 5th June last I moved an Amendment in Committee stage of the Finance Bill to this end. I followed that up with a personal interview with the then Minister of Transport, and, although he proved adamant at the time, he said that if any new facts were brought to bear on the situation, he would be prepared to receive a deputation. In its broad lines the hon. Member for Aberdare has put the case quite fully.

It is clear that the regulations which exist now have gone a long way to drive the steam wagon off the road, and, in so doing, have succeeded in throwing away a very valuable market for coal coming from South Wales. It is mentioned in the report on the distressed areas, where Mr. Evan Williams, on behalf of the coal owners, says that in respect of coal for steam vehicles the imposition of the additional Duty in 1933 had driven 500 steam vehicles off the road. I cannot believe that that, affecting as it does such a large market for coal, can be the right way of dealing with a distressed area, and I would beg the Minister of Transport, before he takes a final decision in

the matter, to receive a deputation of all interests concerned. I feel fairly confident that the new Minister of Transport will revise the decision which was taken by his predecessor, and in so doing bring some real assistance to an already distressed area.

I naturally read with considerable interests the reports of the commissioners on the distressed areas, but there were one or two passages which interested me more than others. For instance, in the report made by the Civil Lord of the Admiralty in regard to Durham and Tyneside, I find that on page 108 he refers specifically to the possibility of old age pension schemes being used and made applicable to a reduction of unemployment in the area, and, in conclusion, he said:

"Finally, the general reduction of hours or the introduction of a 5-day week—however remote their prospects may appear to-day—cannot be omitted from the picture."

I have devoted some time to a study of the question of a reduction of hours in so far as it might conduce to a solution of the problem of unemployment. I was lucky in the Ballot last year and put a Motion on the Order Paper calling attention to the need for a fairer distribution of leisure and work, and moved:

"That the resources of capital and labour cannot contribute their full share to the prosperity and well-being of the country until leisure and work are more equally distributed than at the present time."

I was interested to learn that the Minister of Labour is to issue an invitation to the Federation of Employers Federations and the Trade Union Council to meet him and discuss, industry by industry, the possibilities of approaching the problem of unemployment from the point of view of shorter hours without any reduction in wages. That brings me to a passage in the report of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, where on page 34, paragraph 45, he says:

"In the Manchester University survey report, special reference was made to the resistance of the miner to transference, and a question which naturally arose during the present investigation was whether miners should be encouraged to transfer from a district which may in a few years time offer employment for an additional 3,000 to 3,500 men."

Later on he points out that:

"Those who have been out of work for long periods tend with passing years and

[Sir A. Baillie.]

continued idleness to become less able ever to resume the strenuous life of the coal miner, and it is possible that a revival in the coal industry may reveal a shortage of skilled men."

Summed up, that really means that there is going to be difficulty, if there is a revival in industry, of finding a sufficient number of skilled men. There is a great danger of a great many skilled men who are now unemployed being hopelessly lost, to the great detriment of the country as a whole. This would not necessarily be peculiar to the coal mining industry, but as I do not wish to confuse the issue I will confine my remarks to that industry. In the utmost friendliness I wish to impress upon the Government that it would be the height of wisdom to take action, and to take action as soon as possible, to ensure a maintenance of the industrial skill, manual dexterity and the morale of the key men in the key industry of this country. Nobody can deny that coal is the foundation of our industrial life, and it is of vital importance that the Government should endeavour to do more than merely relieve distress. The Government should be deeply concerned to maintain an adequate skilled labour force so that when revival takes place the men will be there to provide the output required.

It is probably known to the Secretary for Mines, and I believe it is known to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, that in the district of Scotland where shale oil is mined a system of sharing out work has been in practice for two years. Without going too far back I would explain the situation as follows: About four years ago the industry employed 4,000 shale miners. About four years ago, as a result of the industry working at a loss, 1,000 of the miners were dropped off. A year or so later, when the industry was working at a profit again, that profit was handed back to the men in the following way: There was a general increase of about 13 per cent. in the wages of the men employed on condition that they would work for three weeks and take one week off. Thus the industry was able to re-employ the 1,000 men who had been stopped a year before. Every fourth week a thousand men had a week's leisure and then they worked for three weeks. That scheme was made quite acceptable to the men by the fact that

the industry was able to increase the wage by 13 per cent. At the end of a month or year the net earnings of those engaged in the industry was in no way impaired.

That scheme was calculated to stir the imagination, and I know that I for one was tempted to wonder how such a scheme of fair distribution of work and leisure could be applied to other industries such as the coal-mining industry. Here, of course, the problem became very much more difficult. But the passages in the reports of the commissioners to which I have referred seem to indicate that even as a matter of expediency some such system of sharing work and play should be tried out in certain coal-mining districts, and thus bring back from unemployment and save from losing their craft and their physical and mental fitness to exercise that craft many thousands of unemployed miners. Quite obviously the trouble here would be to expect the miners or their representatives to suggest to those already employed that in order to bring back some of their unemployed comrades their monthly or annual earnings should be reduced, because all those connected with the industry know that there is no room for reduction. I am afraid too that not for a year or two will the coal industry be in a position to increase the wages of the men in that industry sufficiently to justify the proposition which I have outlined.

But it is here that I think the Government should step in. Whenever they can find in a particular district that the employers and employes would agree to put in force some such scheme—it may be an impracticable suggestion, but I put it forward for what it is worth—the Government should come forward, and through the organisations already set up in the district should make an advance to the companies or the collieries in order to enable them to meet the extra charge and the increase in the weekly wage of the miners presently employed. Obviously, this could only be done in certain suitable districts, where, for instance, there was a sufficient number of unemployed skilled miners on the register and where there was a prospect in the more or less immediate future of the demand from the collieries in that district being vastly increased. The difficulty, as has been pointed out by the Chancellor of

the Duchy, is that when that time arrives there may be a lack of skilled men to fill the gap. I only suggest that this should be done in the form of an advance, that as and when the anticipated prosperity of that part of the industry materialises the advances should cease, and that when the anticipated increase in the demand for coal resulted and prosperity returned to those companies and collieries, they should as it were, bit by bit, pay back the advances made to them—advances made to enable them to keep fit and skilled the number of men ultimately required to meet the increased demand.

I do not submit this idea to the House and the Government except in its broad outline and as a new line of approach to the problem of the distressed area. I have made for myself calculations of what this might cost the Government if the anticipated prosperity does not return and the advances or loans cannot be paid back, but I could not justify these calculations actuarially, for I have not at my disposal what I presume the Secretary for Mines has—sufficient material to develop the plan in any detail. What I do most sincerely urge the Government to consider is that it is of first importance to maintain the labour equipment of the nation in adequate numbers and at a maximum pitch of efficiency; and, finally, I believe that the rough suggestion which I have endeavoured to outline would give reasonable prospects of achieving that end without imposing a permanent financial burden upon the country.

10.14 p.m.

Mr. E. J. YOUNG: Those of us who have sat for several hours listening to the Debate on cotton and coal have been driven to the conclusion that only those with technical and statistical knowledge can hope to follow a discussion of that kind. It would not be wise or politic to raise another similar discussion. But I want to say a few words about the position on the north-east coast as referred to in the report of the Commissioner, and to point out one or two other things which the Government might do to their own advantage and to the advantage of the nation, and at the same time help to solve the unemployment problem in that particular area. I came with a great deal of keenness to hear what the Chan-

cellor of the Exchequer has to say but I went away just about as depressed as a person could be by what the right hon. Gentleman did say. We expected that some substantial assistance would have been given to the area known as the north-east coast. There is a rather important town in that area named Middlesbrough which is one of the greatest centres of the iron and steel trade in the Kingdom and it together with other towns and districts on Teeside has been cut out altogether from the benefit of the Government scheme. We have tried to find out why, and it would appear that the Commissioner, who seems to have done the rest of his work very well, has drawn an imaginary line between districts which are simply depressed and those which are derelict. So that under the scheme as it stands we are not to have any assistance at all in spite of all the depression and unemployment which exists in those places.

I do not know why Middlesbrough has been ruled out unless it is that Middlesbrough people would object strongly to their area being termed a derelict area, but it is sufficiently depressed to warrant assistance in some form from the Government. I have figures here from the local authority which show that there are 11,000 people in receipt of unemployment pay, 750 able-bodied persons receiving transitional payment, and more than 4,000 in receipt of outdoor relief, a total of about 16,000 people in a comparatively small town. In addition there is another point which has not been mentioned in those discussions so far and that is the relative amount which local authorities have to pay out of their rates towards transitional benefit. I find that our rates in Middlesbrough amount to about 14s. in the £ but while the average rate paid throughout the United Kingdom towards public relief is 2s. 8½d., in our case it is 3s. 11d. When we come to the question of why Middlesbrough and the Teeside generally have been ruled out of the Government scheme we find one or two extraordinary reasons given by the commission. The first is that Middlesbrough and Stockton and those places have outlets for their production not confined to the North-East Coast. But Durham has an outlet for its coal and Newcastle for its ships in the same way. Those areas do not absorb the whole of their production within the confines of

[Mr. Young.]
their own territories. It seems amazing that because we sent our goods to other parts of the country and to other countries abroad we are not to be allowed to share in the benefit of this scheme or the £1 per head of the unemployed which the Government propose to grant.

There is another point to which I would call attention. Personally, I do not object to, but, on the contrary, approve fairly strongly of the principles of the scheme. I object, of course, to the tiny sum of money which the Government have allotted as a deposit, although I am not led away into the error that that is all we are going to get. But if it is the case that the £2,000,000 is to run to the end of the financial year there is not going to be very much money available for given areas. Some time ago there was a discussion in this House upon providing money for relief works, and it was estimated by the President of the Board of Trade that £1,000,000 spent upon public works of a kind similar to those now proposed provided work for 4,000 people for a year. The party to which I belong estimated that it would provide work for 5,000 persons for a year. The actual figure must be approximately somewhere between the two, and therefore if we set aside £2,000,000 for this purpose it means that we may provide employment for about 8,000 persons. That means 2,000 in each area, a total amounting to about one-third of the seasonal increase in employment last month—not a very large amount, though the principle is decidedly good.

There is a number of other things that the Government could do. We ourselves are not concerned in having a bite from this very tiny cake of £2,000,000, but I would like the Minister and the Government to know that in Middlesbrough we have convened several conferences lately, to which we have invited representatives of all the towns and urban councils on the North-East coast, and we have come to certain conclusions and sent them to the Prime Minister. They have returned with great regularity with the usual rejection slip, that "the Prime Minister regrets," etc., but there is just a little reason to hope, on account of something which the Parliamentary Secretary said in his speech last Thursday. He said:

"Probably many people were under the impression that the appointment of two

commissioners and the allocation of £2,000,000 sterling was the only thing that the Government proposed to do, not merely for the distressed areas, but for the unemployed in the rest of the country. That is not the case. The appointment of the commissioners and the allocation of that preliminary sum of £2,000,000 is additional to all the other efforts that the Government have made, are making, and propose to continue to make by virtue of their present powers."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 15th November, 1934; col. 2292, Vol. 293.]

If it is not too late, might I ask what particular efforts the Government are making now and what they propose to make in future, in addition to this sum of £2,000,000 which they are going to lay down for this particular form of relief? In Middlesbrough in our conferences we drew up concrete proposals for drainage in our towns, river cleansing, and certain other things. In the Press a few weeks ago there was a statement to the effect that the Minister of Transport proposed to advance 75 per cent. towards the cost of restoring or building certain bridges that were in need of restoration or of rebuilding altogether. It is estimated that 6,000 of these bridges need replacing at an average cost of about £5,000 each. Is it possible to know whether many county councils and other authorities are accepting this offer of 75 per cent. from the Road Fund, leaving them to provide for themselves, on an average, another £1,250 each? I have reason to believe that a large number of local authorities have had to refuse because they could not find that additional share from areas already so heavily rated. If one might suggest that, instead of rebuilding or reconditioning 2,000 bridges, the Government should take the whole 6,000 bridges in hand, that they should still draw the 75 per cent. from the Road Fund, and that a special grant from this other or some other fund should be given, so that the whole cost should fall upon the State instead of upon the local authorities, it would give a tremendous impetus to the iron and steel and coal trades.

Other advances might be given for other purposes, such as on roads that want making and widening, and there are many public utility works that could be taken in hand if the local authorities were not so heavily handicapped as they are by reason of the heavy rates entailed by the volume of unemployment which they have to carry. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in his speech paid little

attention to the Commissioner's statement about the heavy burden of rates which handicapped local industry, and did not think it mattered very much in those days, because we had a de-rating system which unloaded a good deal of the rates which had previously been paid by the industrialists. He has forgotten two things. One was mentioned by the hon. Member for Wexmouth (Mr. Rhys Davies), namely, that that share of the rates to a great extent had fallen upon the local traders and local industries. The other is that when the Government derated industry they put additional rates upon transport owing to the petrol duty, and this left the derated areas very little better off than they were before. Rates are a considerable factor, as business people will tell you when they are working out their costings and when their quoting has sometimes to be done to a margin of one farthing a ton. That factor entering into their costings may make all the difference between losing and securing a contract.

I hope something will be done. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour may tell us even to-night what other things the Government have in hand and what they propose to do in future. May I suggest that there is the present scheme, from which some of us are excluded, and we might be given a share of the £2,000,000 for derelict areas. There is also the possibility that the Government may make grants to areas which are distressed but not derelict, and they may authorise local authorities to raise loans for themselves. The Government can make it possible for them to do so. The security of our great towns is ample for any loans which they may wish to raise to help them through this difficult period. There is, in addition, the possibility of attracting new industries to these northern areas. It has been pointed out to us that we have great slag heaps, and an hon. Member told us last year that he could cure a good deal of unemployment by moving the slag heaps and tipping them into the clay holes in Cornwall. Suggestions have been made that the slag heaps should be cleared, but before they can be cleared we have to inform people who have industries to move that these are the places to which to move.

If a foreigner comes from abroad to select a site for his industry, he gravi-

tates to London, only to meet people who send him out to Slough or somewhere on the outskirts of London. He decides on a suitable place and pitches his tent there. I suggest that the Department of Overseas Trade should keep their eye on foreign industries that are likely to set up a branch in this country. When they find from their correspondence that such a thing is contemplated, it would be easy to give an invitation to the representative of a foreign firm to go to the office of the Department where a selection of the sites available and the other amenities which are to be found there could be offered. The visitor would find that England is a very much bigger place than the small area that surrounds London. We should advertise our facilities to those who come here.

There is great congestion growing up around the outskirts of London, while we have business men and local authorities pleading with outstretched hands that they should have an opportunity to live. I represent one of the districts which has resigned itself to having no assistance from the Government under their new scheme, but they hope that at least the Government will give them assistance towards carrying out some necessary services which are beyond the reach of their local authorities, or give them authority to raise a loan so that they can carry on those works on their own responsibility. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary will tell us what the Government propose to do to help industries or areas such as there are on Tees-side in addition to giving this grant, which is good in principle but very bad as regards the amount of money which is allotted as a first instalment.

10.30 p.m.

Lord DUNGLASS: The hon. Member for East Middlesbrough (Mr. Young) began his speech by complaining of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's stinginess in granting no more than £2,000,000 towards the relief of the distressed areas, and he spent the rest of the time in complaining that his constituency would not get a fair share of the benefits. I think it is rather difficult to reconcile those two statements. Surely he has been a little ungrateful, because I remember that last week an hon. Member rose from those benches to tell us that this scheme for appointing commissioners to the dis-

[Lord Dunglass.]

tressed areas was, in the first place, suggested by the right hon. Member for Darwen (Sir H. Samuel). He was very careful not to tell us how much the right hon. Member for Darwen would have given the commissioners when he appointed them, and as it has always been a cardinal principle of the Liberal party, if my hon. Friend will allow me to say so, to splash cash about before they decide how they are to spend it, I think that is a most significant omission.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Aberdare (Mr. G. Hall) say that he did not believe the people of London and those in the country districts of England and Scotland really realise the problem which those of us who know the depressed areas have to face. I recall a Debate on the Ministry of Labour Vote last summer which was really artificial in form. The hon. Member for Gorbals (Mr. Buchanan) complained then that the speeches were merely a dreary repetition of accounts of the poverty in those districts, and that no really constructive suggestions were made. That complaint cannot be made of this Debate, but it was inevitable then, because it is clear that although people in London and in the country districts knew that there was higher unemployment in the depressed areas, knew that it was persistent, knew that it was bad for the morale of the people there and knew also the underlying causes of the depression in the heavy industries, it was difficult to get to grips with that kind of nebulous generality. I think the value of the reports on the depressed areas has been that they have, for the first time, given to the public of Great Britain as a whole a complete picture, with sufficient details in it, to enable definite deductions to be drawn.

In an earlier Debate hon. Members, when referring to the industries of coal, shipbuilding, iron and steel and engineering spoke of them as decaying and dying trades. After reading these reports, although it is clear that they are depressed, and that many districts are really depressed and almost derelict, I feel it is still true to say that this group of industries will for a very long time to come provide a vast field of employment for the people of our country; and for the sake of those districts I think it is well that we should not exaggerate

the general depression in those trades, because that can do nothing but discourage the people who live there. The hon. Member for Aberdare quoted some very depressing figures in regard to the coal exporting districts. I should like to quote some that are rather more encouraging. I have figures pertaining to Scotland for the last year, and I find that the reductions in unemployment in the leading trades are as follow: coal mining, a reduction of 5,000; shipbuilding and ship repairing, 8,000; general engineering, 9,000; and iron and steel trades, 2,000.

The first general conclusion to which we may come on these reports is that there is no continuous landslide, and that whatever remedial measures are proposed by the Government, temporary under-propping will not do any good. The reports show that this is a problem of surplus labour. In some of the leading coalfields we have come to the end of the period of cheap and easy production; in shipbuilding, to the end of the period in which we had a virtual monopoly and, so far as the human element is concerned, at the beginning of an age in which machines will increasingly displace labour. The second broad conclusion to which these reports lead me is that whatever remedial measures are proposed, they must take a form of a long-term policy. It is very necessary to obtain a hold of that, as a background.

The next avenue to be explored seems to be whether there is any large-scale remedy. Can we, for instance, stimulate employment in the heavy trades? I would emphasise and underline the statement in Sir Arthur Rose's report in regard to Lanarkshire as to the key position of the steel and engineering trades, their wide reaction upon employment in the mining and transport industries and the favourable outlook for their expansion owing to the new uses for steel. When we are looking for a host of small remedies with which to deal with this problem of the depressed areas, it is as well that we should realise the immense importance to these areas of the general commercial policy of the Government. The steel industry has gained some stability behind a protective barrier and this is a basis from which it

I want to turn to the possibilities latent in the methods of processing coal. From the economic point of view the processing of coal is obviously going to be of great national importance. It is important both in this Debate and to the districts themselves that the effect upon employment of the expansion of those methods should not be exaggerated. There is now no technical difficulty in producing petrol and oil from coal, but the transition from the laboratory stage to expansion upon a commercial basis is, at best, expensive, gradual and slow. I will deal with low temperature carbonisation and give one or two facts and figures. The main product of low temperature carbonisation is, of course, a kind of semi-coke, a fuel. As the demand for that fuel increases over the years, raw coal must necessarily be displaced. This simple fact seems to me to be very relevant, that, of every 1,000 tons of coal processed, one-tenth, or 100 tons, represents new business; so that it is a little difficult to see how Sir Arthur Rose arrived at his conclusion that the installation of these plants in the depressed areas will in itself lead to the opening of new and deeper seams of coal.

As regards high temperature carbonisation, it is estimated—and I think the Mines Department will confirm these figures as far as they can be confirmed—that when, after 25 years, the whole of our supplies of petrol and oil products are produced from home sources, the additional employment given will be something in the nature of from 30,000 to 40,000 men over the whole country. That is clearly an important development, but I think it will be equally clear to hon. Members that it is not a large-scale remedy fit for immediate application to the present conditions of the depressed areas. In this country to-day we are fighting against continually contracting markets, and the weapon we have to fight is that of cheap labour and the capacity on the part of our competitors for cheap mass production. In this country we have three particular and important assets. We have a technical skill which is unrivalled; we have a capacity, particularly when we are in a tight corner, for working hard; and we have a knowledge of business and business methods. If these three factors can be mobilised and worked to full

capacity, I believe we can not only hold the markets which we have at present, but may well push further ahead into those markets which at present are held by countries having cheap labour and methods of cheap production.

The House will see, and industry will appreciate, that this means the closest co-operation—much closer co-operation than there is to-day—between Capital and Labour. Labour must be prepared to work hard. If we are to have a five and a-half or five-day week, it will be necessary to work as hard as, or harder than, in six days. It means, also, that Labour must realise the necessity for supporting the introduction of the newest and best and most efficient machinery. Machinery displaces men, but it does not displace nearly as many men as inefficiency and failure to keep up to date. The employers, on their side, will have to realise that they must work on a finer margin of profit than they have been accustomed to in the more prosperous days before the War. I feel convinced that the only way in which we can eradicate this permanent surplus of male labour is by the two branches of the industry getting together, working together, and pooling their resources, the Government, where possible, giving them every encouragement.

I do not want to take up too much of the time of the House, but I should like to refer quite shortly to two other questions. The first I can only include under the heading of transference of labour. I want to refer in particular to the question of the small village surrounding a coal pit which has been worked out, or which, perhaps, has been flooded—an area which is absolutely and accurately derelict. In the more limited category I want to refer to the village which is remote from the ordinary centres of activity. Again, I differ from Sir Arthur Rose. There are more, in my opinion, than he says. In addition, in Scotland in particular, there are isolated villages where the land is so barren or so starved that land settlement, even on a plot, is quite out of the question. There is a village in my constituency where it is even impossible to keep poultry, because in their innocent peckings they pick up a bit of grit which they think is good for their digestion but which actually kills them with lead poisoning.

[Lord Dunglass.]

Transference in this limited case, I am convinced, is the only remedy. The time for decision is now. The Government are launching a slum clearing campaign and they are launching a Bill to deal with overcrowding. It means that local authorities have to make their housing plans ahead. I suggest that the Government should take a survey of these areas with a view to finding out the industrial life of these villages and that in extreme cases they should be scheduled for demolition. Men under 35 should be trained in trades that are likely to develop, they should be given preference for vacancies, and local authorities should be advised that the remaining people who cannot be moved should be rehoused elsewhere. I can well understand any Government fighting shy of planning industry or production in the future. Who 30 years ago could have foretold the decline of the coal industry and the rise of the motor industry? Who, looking 30 years ahead, can say that the motor trade will still be enjoying extreme prosperity? That is impossible. But, if we cannot with accuracy forecast a birth, we can at any rate register a death, and we can arrive at some accurate idea of the expectation of life in some of these villages. A survey, national if you like, of these depressed areas would, in my opinion, save much local misery and much local and national money and also be of great use to local authorities in formulating their housing plans.

My last suggestion is to see if by any chance secondary and lighter industries can be attracted in any considerable number into these depressed areas. There are three active deterrents and the first is rates. I agree with the hon. Member opposite that the Chancellor of the Exchequer skated rather lightly over this problem. After all, it is clear that, if you have a rate of 20s. in the £, a quarter of that is 5s., and, if you have a rate of 8s., a quarter of that is 2s., and there is a very great difference when you are choosing an area for your factory between one with a 5s. and one with a 2s. rate. That is not all, because you have the rates on the houses in which you have to put your staff. But I agree that the mere removal of that remaining

fraction of rates will not solve the difficulty in itself. You have to change in very many cases the outlook of the local authority. I am not entirely blaming them for the attitude and the financial outlook that they take at present. They must realise that as long as they persist in a high level of rates with apparent indifference to their fate, these local authorities are taking an active part in preventing industrialists bringing employment into their area.

I think that all parties must take a share in the blame for this state of affairs. There are gaunt and monstrous skeletons which meet the prospective employer when he comes to look at these depressed areas. If those who are now responsible for these gaunt and monstrous things could take them away, they would remove a great disability, for they depress those who live in that area and kill the enterprise of any prospective employer. Sir Arthur Rose spoke of something well known—the threats of Members opposite and those below the Gangway, which have hung like a cloud, particularly over the Clyde area. When I came into this House I thought that Members opposite were ogres. I have begun to realise that they are nice, kind old things and that any revolution they bring about would be so kindly that everybody's profit would probably be three times what it was before. If the new commissioners could persuade any foreign manufacturer coming into this country that these threats are the theoretical ramblings of genial idealists, they will have done a great deal to wipe away ideas we know to be quite untrue. The new commissioner has to be a publicity agent, commercial traveller and charwoman. If he does all these things well, I have no hesitation in recommending my constituency to accept the Government's decision, which holds real hope for their future.

10.53 p.m.

Mr. MACMILLAN: The Noble Lord who has just spoken has covered a great deal of ground, and made an attractive contribution to the Debate. He has spoken more particularly of the area with which he is concerned. He has based his remarks upon the report of the commissioner whose duty it was to inquire into Scotland. I am bound to say that after carefully

reading these four reports I am led to the view that that written by the commissioner on Scotland is the least interesting and imaginative. I make no apology after a full day's Debate on a number of subjects which have ranged over a very wide field, in asking the House for a few minutes to return to the important questions relating to the reports of the commissioners for the distressed areas. By a strange misfortune that seems to dog these areas, we have had two successive days' Debates, which we had hoped being allotted to this subject would not have been affected by Debates on other subjects. The second day was allotted to the specific discussion of these reports. The first day was largely taken up with a discussion on the procedure of the House of Commons concerning a matter which arose just before the end of the last Session. To-day we have had another Debate which deeply interested the House, raising important questions of public policy, and which, without offence to subsequent Debates, somewhat detracted from the full vigour which one might hope to be devoted to this subject. I have noticed in the very few years I have been in the House of Commons how difficult it is to have more than one interesting Debate in a day. Often during the early hours of the day a subject is raised which attracts the attention of Members, and it is very difficult to switch back to what was intended to be the main topic of debate.

I make no apology to the House in asking it to revert for a few minutes to the question which has been before the country now for many years and which has been concentrated in the appointment and the report of the commissioners in the distressed areas. The appointment of these commissioners was welcomed by the House of Commons and by the country. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the decision of the Government to make those appointments was brought about no doubt by their own inquiries, and partly by the pressure of public opinion, but very largely as the result of a series of articles which appeared in the "Times" newspaper in the summer of this year, and which revealed for the first time to many southern

readers the full amount of distress and the poignant and sombre picture of these areas, which have so long suffered from conditions which were not altogether known to many of the inhabitants of the more prosperous parts of the country.

The very appointment of these commissioners was in itself a gain, because it brought before the imagination of the country conditions which were not as well known to ordinary people as they are to us. We have the misfortune sometimes either to fight elections or to go about speaking, and within this House itself, to whatever party we belong, there is a very real knowledge of the conditions of the country. We all move about the country, and we speak in each other's constituencies, and we speak to each other, and it is true to say that we learn from each other. Whatever great party divisions may be, we are willing and anxious to learn from the experiences of our fellow Members. But in the country as a whole these conditions, which have long been known to Members who have had the duty of representing those areas, have been hidden, either purposely or by the mere difficulty of getting knowledge through to public opinion, and have not been known to the mass of the English people.

The report of these commissioners have appealed to the imagination of these people, and it is a great gain, apart from the specific recommendations and apart altogether from the decisions, right or wrong, which may be made by the Government of the day. It is a great gain that we have brought in a great State document full of human touches, admirably written, well describing the conditions of the people, and a document which future historians will regard as one of the great State papers of the day. It is a gain that we have presented that picture to the people as a whole, so that when they have to decide as to whether small measures or great measures, whether timid measures or bold measures, be taken, they will have been able to consider the reports of these gentlemen who have been asked to undertake these investigations. War is not the only operation in which it is sometimes an advantage to have a visitation from general headquarters to the front line trenches. I am glad that there has been on this occasion a visit from Whitehall

[Mr. Macmillan.]

to the Passchendale of Durham and
South Wales.

*It being Eleven of the Clock, the Debate
stood adjourned.*

Debate to be resumed To-morrow.

ADJOURNMENT.

Resolved, "That this House do now
adjourn."—[*Captain Margesson.*]

Adjourned accordingly at One
minute after Eleven o'Clock.

